

This week's Novelette is an exhilarating Story of Love and Adventure.

# THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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FOR THE WEEK ENDING AUGUST 10, 1901.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"IF YOU BEGAN TO DOUBT ME AFTER I WAS YOUR WIFE YOU WOULD BREAK MY HEART!" SAID MONA DECIDEDLY.

## MONA'S FAILURE.

By the Author of "Beryl's Engagement,"  
"Miss Tabitha's Money," &c., &c.

[A NOVELETTE.]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

### CHAPTER I.

**I**T was a tall, imposing-looking house in one of the broadest roads about Maida Vale—a house that under no circumstances could have been called homelike or cosy, but which, under the auspices of its present mistress, had contrived to obtain for itself such an

amount of stiffness and dignity as quite to distinguish it from all its neighbours; and though there was no plate on the door, and the name St. Ronan's on the gateposts had no particular educational flavour about it, yet one glance convinced the most casual passer-by that the large homelike building was a school.

And the assumption was perfectly right. St. Ronan's was a school of the most select and exclusive type. Miss Morris had long ago saved sufficient to retire upon; but the lady had grown used to the routine of her life as principal of such an establishment. She loved managing, had a veritable talent for piling up extras, and, in fact, felt that she should be quite thrown away if she drifted into private life.

A tall and elegant-looking woman of over fifty, who dressed invariably in the softest and richest of black silk, she looked what she was—a gentlewoman by birth, and one who in her youth had moved in the best society.

Miss Morris had faults, but she was not a sham. Everything about her establishment was genuine—the best of professors, ample and dainty food, every comfort needful for health; and, besides these, a really conscientious superintendence she gave her pupils, and if she charged a far higher price than she need have done for these things, the fault probably rested with the public, who never remonstrated with her on that subject.

Miss Morris sat in a low easy chair, in

Next week's: **THE CHOICE SHE MADE.** Complete Story.

her own special sanctum, one July evening, about four weeks before the end of the summer term. All things were going well with St. Roman's. The last batch of pupils sent up for the public examinations had passed, and passed high. A most gratifying call had been made on the principal that very afternoon by the wife of a peer to make arrangements for her daughters joining the ranks of St. Roman's after the vacation. This completed the full twenty, a number of pupils Miss Morris never exceeded.

Prosperity, popularity, good health, and the satisfaction of feeling herself a power in her little world, all these were Miss Morris's, and yet she looked troubled and ill-pleased.

She rose presently and rang the bell. She was not the woman to postpone a duty because it was disagreeable. She was prompt in all actions, when once she had decided on them. She did not like the step she was about to take, and yet, having resolved on it, she would not shrink for a day.

"Ask Miss Carstairs to come to me here," she said to the page who answered the bell.

A minute's delay and a girl of eighteen or nineteen appeared—a slight, delicate looking creature, who was evidently in no small awe of the principal. She was dressed in black, and, without being actually shabby, her attire told of poverty.

The dress was of plain merino, rather coarse. It was made without the smallest attempt at taste or fashion; there was no trimming on the badly-hung scanty skirt, and the sleeves were a good two inches too short—a strange contrast to the elegant costumes affected by the young ladies of St. Roman's, and to the soft rich silk which fitted Miss Morris so admirably.

"Sit down," said the principal, not unkindly. "I want to talk to you a little, Miss Carstairs. Do you know I have had a letter from your aunt about you this morning?"

The pink spots burned in the girl's cheek, making her for the moment almost beautiful. They faded all too quickly, leaving her even paler than before.

"Mrs. Carstairs wrote to me," she said, timidly. "She seemed vexed I could not tell her whether I satisfied you, Miss Morris."

"My dear, if you remember, I told your aunt I did not believe you had enough age or dignity for even a junior teacher here. I promised to try the experiment for a term, letting you help with the children, and receiving lessons from the professors in return. I thought that would give her time to make some other arrangements for you. I never thought of your staying here permanently."

There were tears in Mona's eyes as she answered.

"I have done my best, Miss Morris. I have indeed," said the poor girl, earnestly.

"I am sure you have," said Miss Morris, kindly; "but you are too young and too yielding to get on here. The fact is, my dear, you have not the spirits or energy to cope with strong, healthy girls. You always look ready to cry if things go wrong, and that is not the way to get through life. I think you have made a mistake in choosing teaching for a profession. Unless your character changes very much, you will never have any authority over your pupils."

"But what am I to do?" asked Mona, half deprecatingly. "I have been brought up to teach, and I don't know how to do anything else."

"Pardon me, Miss Carstairs. I am not complaining of your acquirements, but of your management. You are so disheartened and low-spirited, the youngest child could

see and take advantage of it. I have watched you carefully, and I have never yet seen you look happy. To succeed with young people you ought to be cheerful."

Mona sighed.

"Then you will not take me back after the holidays, Miss Morris?"

"I cannot. My school would become undisciplined if I kept a teacher who could not make herself obeyed. I will write to Mrs. Carstairs and assure her it is not your fault."

"She will never believe you," said Mona, with a sob. "She says I am born to be a failure, and a trouble to her."

"Is she your only relation?" asked Miss Morris, kindly. "Tell me all about your family, and I will try to think of something to help you. I do not care for Mrs. Carstairs, and I can quite understand she makes things hard for you."

It was a very simple story, but Caroline Morris thought, as she listened to it, she had rarely heard one sadder.

The only child of a retired officer and his wife, Mona's early days had been full of happiness. Her mother died when she was twelve years old, her father, one year later. He had invested the price of his commission in an annuity on the joint lives of himself and his wife, and so was unable to make any provision for his child. All he could do was to send for his only surviving brother, and beg him to take care of Mona.

Hugh Carstairs had offended all his family by his marriage. His father had cut him off without even the proverbial shilling. His eldest brother had died young, leaving one son, who was brought up by his grandfather; and who now, when Hugh lay dying, was a lad of seventeen, the head of the family, and Sir Ronald Carstairs, of Carstairs.

To appeal to him would have been useless. He had not even the disposal of his own property. Charles Carstairs, his younger uncle and guardian, seemed the only suitable protector for Mona, and so to him the dying father wrote in his anguish; and he, a jovial good-tempered man of forty, had come down to the little village, soothed his brother's last moments, and taken Mona home with him.

"If only Uncle Charles had lived, things would have been different," Mona assured Miss Morris; "but he died only three months after papa, and I think his wife always hated me. She managed to get me into a kind of charity school, and I stayed there, holidays and all, until I was seventeen. Then I had a very bad illness, and they said I was not strong enough to be trained for a teacher. Aunt Mary sent me down to Carstairs, Sir Ronald was abroad, and she had the use of his house; and a kind old housekeeper, who had known papa, nursed him till I was quite well, and then Mrs. Carstairs brought me here."

"But surely, they would help you at the school where you stayed so long?"

Mona shook her head.

"They said I should never be strong enough for anything but private teaching, and that I looked too young to enter a family."

Miss Morris groaned inwardly, for it was her own opinion clothed in different words.

"You might be a companion," she said, hopefully. "Has your aunt thought of that?"

"She tried to find me a companionship before I came here, but she could hear of nothing."

"Has she any children of her own?"

"Three girls. They are all older than I am—at least, they used to be."

"What do you mean, child?" exclaimed

the principal. "If they were older than you once they always would be."

"No," said Mona, simply. "May came out when she was eighteen, just four years ago (she is the second), but she told me at Christmas she was nineteen."

"Hem!" Miss Morris looked scornful. "I should not think it is a very desirable home for you."

"I would rather sweep a crossing than go there!" cried Mona, impulsively. "Miss Morris, couldn't you keep me here?"

"No, my dear, I couldn't. I must not risk the children's growing disobedient, and I am sure your nerves would get utterly unstrung if you went on putting such a strain on them; but there are four clear weeks before the holidays, and I will try and think of some plan for you before then."

The plan was very simple. She drove over to Peperton Place, and interviewed Mrs. Carstairs. She found the widow in a small house in a very aristocratic neighbourhood, and being a shrewd woman took her measure in five minutes.

"Poor and unscrupulous. Lives beyond her means in the hope of marrying her daughters well. The worst possible home for that poor child."

Mrs. Carstairs was all suavity to her visitor until Mona's name was mentioned, then she spoke bitterly of the burden and expense the girl was to her (Miss Morris remembered the pupil-teacher's poor little wardrobe, and doubted the last item), and how foolishly generous it had been of her late husband to impose such a charge upon her.

"You should ask your nephew to assist you," suggested the schoolmistress, mildly. "To a man of Sir Roland's wealth, a small provision for his cousin would be a trifle."

"Roland is like a son of my own, but I would not tax his kindness. Some day, perhaps, when he is really my son, I might—"

"Do you mean he is engaged to your daughter?" asked Miss Morris, bluntly.

"There is no formal engagement. Dear Molly was too young when Roland went abroad for such a thing. But we have always seen how his wishes tended, and when he comes home from his foreign tour I daresay I shall be persuaded to give my consent. A mother is always weak where her children's happiness is concerned."

"And what about poor Mona?" demanded Miss Morris, coming back to the charge.

"If you persist in making her a governess you will have her back on your hands every three months, I warn you."

"But she must earn her own living."

"Undoubtedly, but at present she is not strong enough to manage herself, much less others. Give her a year's holiday, and let her have a taste of happiness and cheerful society. After that she will be another creature."

Mrs. Carstairs shook her head.

"I cannot possibly have her here. She does not get on with my own girls; besides, think of the expense of dressing her and taking her about! But I have the greatest respect for your opinion, Miss Morris, and if you really think she needs rest I will pay for her board at some home or institution. I believe there is a place in the country where they take in governesses for ten shillings a week."

Miss Morris only kept her temper by an effort as she listened to this liberal offer.

"I am afraid such a place would not improve either your niece's health or spirits. Is it possible that her mother left any relations who would be willing to receive Mona on a good long visit? Blood is thicker than water, and perhaps they might have the excessive sensitiveness of your daugh-



ters, and so not object to the society of a poor relation."

The sarcasm was quite lost upon Mrs. Carstairs, who answered, affably,—

"My unfortunate brother-in-law married beneath him, and his wife's family were in very humble life."

"Just so. Could you give me any clue to finding them out? It would be good for Mona to have their acquaintance, and might relieve you of her support."

"I tried to trace them when my husband died. I went down to the village where Mrs. Hugh Carstairs had lived before her marriage, but I could discover nothing of her relations. Her father and mother were both dead, and her only sister had gone to join a brother in the Colonies."

"I suppose you do not happen to remember which colony?" said Miss Morris, quietly.

"Oh, yes. The Cape—a place called Spring Vale. Mr. West has been there for thirty years, so no doubt he has become quite a savage, and he was in a very low way of life before he went. In fact, he worked his passage out."

"All the more credit to him," said the schoolmistress. "Well, Mrs. Carstairs, I shall write to Mr. West, and ask if he would be willing to do anything for his sister's child. I intend spending the vacation in Devonshire, and if Mona has not found anything suitable perhaps you will let her be my guest until we hear from her uncle."

"I shall be delighted. It is so good of you." But evidently the lady would have been more grateful if Miss Morris had proposed to retain Mona as an unpaid teacher.

"I have seen your aunt," said the Principal to Mona that same evening. "And I quite understand your not wishing to go back to her. She tells me you have an uncle—your mother's brother—in South Africa, and I mean to write to him."

Mona shivered.

"It sounds like begging."

"No, it doesn't. Mr. West may have children he wants a governess for, or he may know of some family seeking a teacher. Anyway, the voyage out and the new life might make a different creature of you."

But Mona was still sad.

"It only wants four weeks to the holidays," she said, gravely, "and it would take six to get an answer from Africa, even if it came by return of post."

"Well, I have told Mrs. Carstairs I hope you will be my guest in Devonshire for the vacation. We will leave the school and its regulations behind us, Mona, and try if the sea-air will not make you brighter."

"It is good of you!" said the girl, gratefully; "but, Miss Morris, I can't go to the seaside with you. You know heaps of people, and—"

"And I am not fond of black dresses in the dog-days," said Miss Morris, cheerfully guessing what was in the girl's mind.

"Never mind, Mona. If you are to be my companion you ought to have a salary of some kind, and I think it had better take the form of a summer outfit for the seaside!"

Caroline Morris had not kept a school more than half her life without finding out that letter writing was an art which required both tact and skill.

She gave a whole hour to her epistle to Ruben West, and the result was happy for the note could in no way have offended the most irritable of men; and since it asked for nothing but his advice, did not come at all under the category of begging letters.

She said very simply that his niece, Mona Carstairs, was in delicate health, and re-

quired change of scene. She had been educated for a governess, and was an accomplished sweet-tempered girl. Did Mr. West think there was any opening for her in Spring Vale, and, if so, would he give her the benefit of his recommendation.

Miss Morris concluded by expressing her warm interest in Mona, and regretted the girl was not old enough to fill a recognised position in her school. She was sure her young friend was unhappy among her father's relations, and she thought the sea voyage would greatly benefit her health.

## CHAPTER II.

ONLY two months from the evening on which poor Mona Carstairs had received her dismissal from St. Ronan's, and two ladies were seated in a pretty private sitting-room at their hotel at Daymouth, the new watering place a few miles from Plymouth.

Miss Morris did not do things by halves. In taking Mona to Devonshire with her she had meant to give the girl a real taste of pleasure, and she had succeeded thoroughly. From the pretty outfit and new leather trunks to the little purse slipped into her hand, with a whisper about bathing and other little expenses, the schoolmistress had forgotten nothing that could add to the girl's pleasure, with the result that only three weeks after their arrival at Daymouth Mona looked another creature, and Miss Morris fancied she had discovered the true reason for Miss Carstairs keeping her niece in such a subdued, despondent state, since this bright-eyed, smiling Mona might have proved quite a formidable rival to her three more fortunate cousins.

Miss Carstairs was sitting on the balcony, her long waving hair flowing over her shoulders that it might dry in the sunshine, for she had only just come in from bathing.

The sun had kissed her face, and robbed it of the pallid sickly hue which had been its accustomed tint, besides giving her cheeks some roses. Then, instead of the miserable coarse merino, she wore a boating costume of thin blue serge, trimmed with white braid, and a white silk handkerchief knotted at her throat.

Her pretty feet were encased in dainty, well-made shoes—in fact, she looked more like a rich man's petted child than the little neglected half-pupil of St. Ronan's.

Miss Morris looked on well pleased at the change her liberality had worked. A martinet in business matters, she had decided not to keep Mona the moment she made up her mind it would be against the interests of her school; but in private life the successful principal could afford to indulge her fancies, and having conceived the wish to see Mona's face when she was happy, she had set to work to gratify the whim with admirable results. In fact, she petted her young friend to such an extent that Mona wondered how she could ever have been afraid of her.

"Come indoors now," said Miss Morris, kindly. "I can't talk seriously while you stay on the balcony, and I have just had a letter from your uncle."

"From Africa?" asked Mona, as she obeyed, and placed her chair near her friend's.

"Yes. I am glad it did not come until we had had this pleasant time together."

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will be a regular bumper pennyworth of thirty-two pages, containing two long complete novels and the opening chapters of a new Serial Story.

You will believe now, Mona, that I don't want to advise you against your own wishes!"

"I am sure you do not."

"Then read this letter."

"Spring Vale, Cape Colony,  
1st August, 18

"DEAR MADAM,—

"I beg to acknowledge, with thanks, your letter of the 4th ult. Until it reached me I was in ignorance not only of my sister's death, but even that she had left a child. You may have heard Captain Carstairs regarded his wife's family as much beneath him, and he insisted that she should break off all intercourse with us on her marriage. I had been abroad then ten years, and my opinion was neither asked nor offered, or I should certainly have told Naomi no good could have come of an unequal match.

"The past is past, and I am getting an elderly man. I have no daughter of my own, and if Naomi's child is really obliged to work for her living, I think it is better that she should cast in her lot with me, rather than seek a home among strangers. From your letter you show so warm an interest in my niece that I am sure you will give her your advice and counsel. If she is a plain-spoken, sensible girl, who can be content without fashionable folk, and does not look down on a man because he has earned his own living, send her out to me, and I will see to her future; but if she has been brought up to be a fine lady we should never get on, and she had better remain in England. I enclose a draft for a hundred pounds, for her passage and outfit, if she should decide to come to me. If she thinks she shall be happier in her native land, let her keep the money as a present from her mother's brother.

"Yours faithfully,

"REUBEN WEST."

"P.S.—I should like to have your decision by return mail. If Mona comes here she ought to sail not later than the end of September, so as to arrive before the heat of summer begins to be oppressive."

Mona Carstairs read this letter carefully through, and then she said, gravely,—

"I should like to go."

"Why?" asked Miss Morris, laconically. She had quite decided that Mona must go, but she wanted to know the reasons that had brought about the girl's choice.

"I think he would be kind, and, Miss Morris, I would rather starve than go back to my aunt Carstairs. After all your kindness, I think her cruelty would be worse to bear than ever."

"You must not expect an English gentleman," said Miss Morris, thoughtfully. "Remember, if you go to Mr. West, you must not let him feel you are ashamed of his homely ways!"

"Mother was a lady," said Mona, thoughtfully. "She died when I was only twelve, but I am sure of that, her brother couldn't be very dreadful."

"He worked his passage out to Africa thirty years ago," said Miss Morris, thoughtfully, "and he has probably associated with very common people since. Then he may be married, and his wife be a very inferior person!"

Mona shook her head.

"I think I will risk it. I am so tired of being told I am a failure. Uncle Reuben will be kind to me for my mother's sake, and his wife can't be worse to me than Mrs. Carstairs."

"The mail goes out to-morrow. If you are quite decided, Mona, I will write, then we can drive into Plymouth to-day, and make inquiries about the ships."

The next term of St. Ronan's commenced

on the twenty-second of September, and Miss Morris decided that as it was not worth while for Mona to return to London, she herself could manage to stay in Devonshire until the middle of September, which would give her time to see her charge safely on board the *Grecian*, which left Plymouth on the twelfth. It was a little sooner than the time named by Mr. West, but no doubt he would be agreeably surprised at their promptitude.

The passage was taken that very afternoon, and the next fortnight Miss Mona spent a great part of each day in shopping, so that Mona's wardrobe increased rapidly.

"I shall not write to Mrs. Carstairs until you are fairly gone," said the schoolmistress, kindly, "unless you wish to say good-bye to her."

Mona shook her head.

"I never want to see her again. You are the only creature in England I shall miss. You have been so good to me!"

"You will be coming back some of these days," said Miss Morris, cheerfully, "and then you must pay me a visit at St. Ronan's. I have saved ten pounds from Mr. West's draft to put in your purse; and now, Mona, let me give you three little hints. Don't let your uncle know you expected him to be common. If he has a wife don't betray surprise, if you find her ways different from those you have been used to; and, above all, my dear, never ask them for money. I believe people who have got rich suddenly particularly dislike parting with it. Your outfit will last some time, and I daresay your uncle will give you something of his own accord if you wait, but don't ask for it!"

"I couldn't!" said Mona, gravely. "I think it would choke me to ask for money; but, Miss Morris, do you think he is rich?"

"I fancy he must have plenty of money, or he could not have sent that cheque. Perhaps," added the spinster, whose ideas were slightly hazy as to social life in the colonies, "there is nothing to spend money on out there, and so people are rich on a little."

The day came at last. Miss Morris took her charge on board the *Grecian*, and requesting an interview with the captain, commended Miss Carstairs to his special charge.

"She is going to Spring Vale," commenced the lady, speaking much as though Mona had been a hamper, "and I expect she will be sent for as soon as the ship gets to the Cape; but, perhaps, if not, you could kindly see to her getting there!"

The captain smiled and promised. Probably it was not the first time by a good many he had been entrusted with similar charges.

Miss Morris embraced Mona with something like a tear in her eyes, and then stepped into the boat waiting to take her on shore. Ten minutes later the *Grecian* was sailing away from the English coast.

A kind-hearted old lady who had watched the leave-taking, turned to Mona with a cheerful inquiry, "was she going to the Cape, and was she all alone?"

"Yes; I am going out to my uncle!" said Miss Carstairs, who had received a hint not to allude to Mr. West by name.

"Ah! I've crossed nine times in all, and now I'm going home again. I've been in the colony hard on forty years."

"And is it nice?"

The old lady laughed.

"It's not a bad place. My girl's say it's better than England; but then you see they were born out there!"

By the time they reached Madeira, Mona had decided there was nothing so delightful as a sea voyage.

The pretty, bright-eyed English girl was

a general favourite with all the passengers, and no one who had seen her cheerful smile would have believed she was the depressed, mournful-looking pupil teacher of St. Roman's.

Mona found Miss Morris's directions very difficult to obey. She had been strictly admonished not to speak of her uncle, and when her new friends showed a great interest in her future she was obliged to parry their questions as best she could.

Oddly enough, the general impression received was that she was going to her father's brother; and as no one on board the *Grecian* had actually been to Spring Vale, they concluded "Mr. Carstairs" must be a very old man, who never stirred beyond his own town, and therefore, was little known in the colony at large.

"He won't keep her long!" said Mrs. Ingleton (the lady who had "crossed nine times") to the captain one afternoon when they were within a day or two of the Cape. "Depend upon it that child will marry before she's been out a year!"

Captain Peters smiled. He was not blind to the fact that Miss Carstairs was extremely pretty, and that one or two gentlemen on board thought so. He followed Mrs. Ingleton's glance, and saw Mona finishing a little sketch she had made of St. Helena when they stopped at that island. A tall young man was standing close to her, apparently directing her efforts.

"Yes," said the captain, drily. "I know Noel is fond of art, but I don't think in this case, his interest in the sketching is purely professional. What do you say?"

"They would make a handsome couple!" said Mrs. Ingleton, approvingly. "Who is he?"

"I've no idea. He has crossed with us two or three times, but I don't think he has any relations at the Cape. He's unusually silent about himself; and, though all the ladies like him, this is the first time I ever saw him really taken with one of them."

Meanwhile, Mona had dropped her pencil, and leant back in her deck chair, as though inclined for a nap.

Mr. Noel watched her thoughtfully. He seemed only a few years her senior—a handsome, earnest looking man, with dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a strangely sad expression of face.

"I cannot make it out," he said at last.

"Cannot make what out?" demanded Mona. "You look as though you were discussing some terrible problem, Mr. Noel!"

"I cannot understand your starting on a voyage like this by yourself. What on earth were your relations thinking about to let you?"

"I haven't many, and they were decidedly glad to be relieved of me."

"I can't believe that! And you really have an uncle in Africa? Do you know I never heard of a Mr. Carstairs out there?"

Mona blushed crimson.

"I know something of the family," went on Mr. Noel. "I have met Mrs. Charles Carstairs and her daughters. I may say they have discussed their relations before me pretty freely, but they never mentioned any in Africa."

Mona looked at the young man wistfully.

"I would rather tell you the truth," she said, simply, "but Miss Morris advised me not to speak of my uncle if I could help it. I am going to my mother's brother, and so his name is not Carstairs at all."

"And why were you not to speak of him?"

"Because Miss Morris thought people might tell me things about him, and she said it would be better to judge for myself."

Noel smiled.

"Your secret is safe with me," he said, kindly. "And I daresay she is right, for I know people do gossip on board ship. Is your uncle married? Does he live at Cape Town?"

"He lives at Spring Vale. He has no children, but I don't know if he is married. He went abroad more than thirty years ago."

"I hope he will be good to you," returned the young man, half dreamily. "I have heard Mrs. Carstairs speak of you, but I always fancied you were a child."

"I am nineteen."

"And Alice is twenty-one. She is the youngest of the three girls. Are any of your cousins engaged?"

"Not formally; but Mary, the second, is to marry Sir Roland Carstairs when he comes from his foreign tour."

"Who told you so?"

"Aunt Mary. I heard it more than a year ago. It is quite settled."

"I don't think it is," retorted Mr. Noel. "I know Roland Carstairs intimately, and I don't believe he is a marrying man."

"Is he nice?"

"I really don't know what a lady means by that word. He is not a bad-meaning fellow."

"I used to wish I knew him," said Mona, absently. "You see, he is my cousin just as much as Alice's, and I used to pity him because he had no parents. He was quite as much alone in the world as me."

"And is likely to remain so," answered Mr. Noel. "He is not the sort of fellow to make many friends."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. To begin with, he's awfully rich, and he has a dread of being made much of on that account; and then he isn't strong."

"His mother died of consumption," said Mona, gravely. "I remember hearing of it. She was an earl's daughter. I believe that was why all the family were so angry at my father's marriage. They thought he might have found a high-born wife like his brother."

"Heaven forbid!" muttered Mr. Noel from behind his moustache; and then he walked off abruptly, leaving Mona to herself.

But ship-board gossip was not wrong in saying that he paid her a great deal of attention.

He never said a word that could embarrass her; he showered no idle compliments upon her; but from the moment he heard her name he seemed to make her comfort his first care, and to regard her as his own peculiar charge.

Mrs. Ingleton believed it was a genuine love affair, but that Mr. Noel had old-fashioned notions, and would not speak the decisive words without the sanction of Mona's uncle.

Captain Peters was not so sure. He had seen a great deal of the young Englishman, and had never thought him likely to marry.

The anxiously-expected moment came at last. In the small hours of the morning the ship dropped anchor in Table Bay, and Mona's first waking thought was to wonder whether her uncle had sent anyone to meet her, or if she should receive a letter instructing her how to reach Spring Vale.

Somehow there had been so much to amuse and divert her on the voyage. Everyone had been so unfailingly kind to her. She had enjoyed everything so much that she had found but little time to trouble about her future, and had well-nigh forgotten the dreary truth that she had come to Africa as the "poor relation" of a man who had worked his way out from England thirty years before.



Mona awoke early—hours before it was of any use to rise. And as she lay in her berth thinking over her future she grew very anxious.

Supposing her uncle was married to a wife after the pattern of Mrs. Carstairs, and that the lady objected to his charitable invitation?

There was nothing in Mr. West's letter about his own circumstances, except that he had no daughter. He might have married late in life; and, if so, the very fact of there being no message from his wife seemed to prove she objected to Mona's coming.

Then, supposing they kept no servant, and Mrs. West did her own housework, in what would she expect her niece to assist her?

Mona decided she must refuse no work, however humble. But she hoped her ignorance would be forgiven for having spent her life from thirteen to the present time in schools, except a brief spell of illness, and a briefer visit to the Carstairs', she knew about as little of domestic duties as it was possible for a girl to know. Certainly she could undertake needlework, both plain and fancy, was fair at accounts, and wrote a clear, plain hand. Perhaps her uncle would let her assist in his business. It would be pleasanter than pottering about the kitchen.

Enter the stewardess, with early coffee and biscuit.

"It's not far off seven, Miss Carstairs, and I thought you'd like to be getting up. And I've brought you this letter."

Left alone, Mona took up the massive with its unfamiliar brown stamp and large postmark. She knew at once it came from her uncle, for she recognised the writing as the same as that the letter Miss Morris had received from him. Evidently he was not coming to meet her, and had sent all instructions for her journey. On the whole, Mona felt relieved.

If Mr. West were a very uncouth member of society it would be pleasanter not to meet him under the eye of the critical passengers of the *Grecian*.

She did not hurry over her toilet, and she waited to read her uncle's letter till she was dressed. She felt no curiosity as to its contents. The mere fact of receiving it proved she was to continue her journey in solitude.

Her attire had somewhat troubled Mona, for though Mr. West had sent money for her outfit she had an idea (the result of her Aunt Carstairs' training) that as a "poor relation" she ought not to look too well-dressed, and as Miss Morris had bestowed both time and taste in the selection of her clothes she hardly possessed anything that would come under the head of "dowdy." As Mr. West had specially mentioned his objection to finery and fashion he might take umbrage at some of her costumes.

But this fear faded away now the great man was not coming, and Miss Carstairs put on a fascinating blue serge dress, braided in the same colour, which fitted her like a glove, quite vain enough to be glad to look her best on her farewell with her new friends, a sailor-hat sat gracefully on her fair hair. She looked just the picture of happy girlhood as she tripped lightly up the steps of the companion-ladder on to the deck.

Mr. Noel was waiting for her.

"I want to hear your first impressions of Africa," he said, kindly. "What do you think of it?"

"It looks very red—and who in the world are all these people?"

He laughed.

"Most of the passengers have friends to welcome them. Then a few of the strangers are here to see the captain on business. It's quite a usual thing to see a crowd of

fresh faces at breakfast on these occasions. You will miss a few familiar ones, too, for some of the passengers have gone on shore."

"Already!"

"Well, it's past eight, and they thought they might as well breakfast at home."

One of the strangers passed close to Mona and her companion—a tall, bearded man, who might have been a little over thirty. He was dressed in a rough tweed suit, which fitted him well. His bearing was erect and soldier-like, his face grave and thoughtful. It seemed to Mona he looked at her searchingly.

"Who is that?" she asked Noel, when he was out of ear shot.

"I have no idea! I can tell you one thing about him, he has an English tailor. He is probably husband, son, or brother of one of our passengers, and is getting a little annoyed at the lady's not making more haste to greet him."

"Are you going to stay in Cape Town, Mr. Noel?" asked Mona, suddenly.

"I have no idea—and you? Is your uncle coming to take you to Spring Vale?"

"Oh, no. He has written instructions for my journey."

"And what are they?"

"I don't know. I haven't opened his letter."

Noel smiled.

"I should advise you to do so at once. He has probably deputed some friend living here to receive you, and see you into the train. That is quite the custom out here. Your temporary host or hostess may be on board and watching for you all this time."

"You really think so?"

"Certainty is better than thought," replied Noel, cheerfully. "You had better open your letter at once. I will see that you are undisturbed," and he retreated to a little distance as Mona took out the letter and tore it open anxiously, for his words had alarmed her not a little.

"Spring Vale, October 1st.

"MY DEAR NIECE,—

"I am very glad to hear you have decided to cast in your lot with us, and hope you may be very happy in South Africa. I cannot well leave home just at present, but your cousin Norman is in Cape Town, and I have asked him to meet you, and bring you to Spring Vale, where you will receive a warm welcome from your affectionate uncle,

"REUBEN WEST."

Mona's cheeks grew crimson with dismay. This was worse than anything she had expected. Her uncle himself might have been an awkward person to present to her friends on board; but, at least, he was her mother's own brother.

She already owed him gratitude, and these thoughts would have helped her to bear with his shortcomings, but his son—?

Mona pictured to herself a red-faced, freckled youth of the ploughboy type, who would probably call her "Miss," and certainly have no conversation beyond "Yes" and "No."

How devoutly she wished she had opened the letter in her cabin, and not have come on deck until the last moment. Now she would probably have to breakfast with her cousin, and do the honours of the ship to him. She had not the slightest experience of boys, and she imagined Norman to be more of a boy than a man.

Her uncle had been thirty years in the Colony. Probably it took him twelve to grow rich enough to think of matrimony, which would bring his son to the age of sixteen or seventeen.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Noel,

as he came back to her side. "Do you know you are looking as though an avalanche of trouble had fallen on your head?"

"I think it has."

"But what is wrong? Is your uncle ill? Did he not expect you by this steamer?"

"He is quite well, and he has sent my cousin to meet me. Oh! Mr. Noel, what shall I do? How can I travel hundreds of miles with a great awkward boy I have never seen?"

Noel laughed, though his voice was kind.

"Cheer up, if that is all. Depend upon it, the 'boy' will be more afraid of you than you can possibly be of him. When is he coming?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I should say you need not try and find him. As soon as he comes on board he will ask one of the officials for 'Miss Carstairs.' The burden of the search rests with him."

Again the dark-haired man, whom Noel had declared must have an English tailor, passed close to them, and this time there was no mistaking the fact that he looked steadily at them, his grave eyes expressing marked disapproval.

"I don't like that man!" said Mona, with a little shiver. "He looks as though he hated me."

"Nonsense!" returned Mr. Noel. "I grant you he looks terribly in earnest; but it is a head and face anyone might be proud of."

The bells sounded for breakfast.

Mona had risen to go below when Captain Peters came up to her.

"I am to resign the charge Miss Morris intrusted to me," he said, pleasantly, "for your cousin has arrived. He has asked me to present him to you!"

Mona was trembling in every limb.

Noel had retreated at once.

"This is your cousin, doctor," said the captain, cordially. "I am sure if I had known she was your father's niece it would have been an extra inducement to me to take care of her, though, as it was, I think we all did our best to make things pleasant for her. Eh! Miss Carstairs?"

"They have been delightful!" said Mona, timidly, and then venturing to look up she saw that the man presented to her was the stranger who had been watching her so intently. Involuntarily she drew a step back, and said, naively, "you can't be my cousin!"

He bowed stiffly.

"I have a letter from my father in my pocket if you require proof of my identity, or I fancy Captain Peters would assure you I am Norman West."

"Of course I will," said the captain heartily. "Norman West, M.D., who has crossed the ocean twice with me already, and whom I hope to take over again before long."

"I know it sounds ridiculous," said Mona, trying to speak naturally, "and you will laugh at me, but I expected a boy!"

They did laugh, both of them; but as the captain went off Dr. Norman's face softened, and he spoke to Mona in a much kinder tone.

"I think I understand. My father wrote that his 'boy' would meet you. It's a way he has, and I can't get him to leave it off. I am over thirty, but I believe he will always think of me as a lad!"

They went down to breakfast, and Dr. West attended to his cousin's wants with scrupulous courtesy; but Mon. was disappointed to see how formal his manner was.

Had they been utter strangers instead of first cousins he could not have seemed more coldly distant. She had been prepared for

want of polish and courtly ways. It came on her suddenly that she would have preferred to this perfect politeness, which yet had no warmth in it.

"I suppose he is married, and has half-a-dozen children, so that he grudges my having a home at his father's," thought the girl, bitterly. "Well, he need not make it quite so plain how unwelcome I am!"

Dr. West broke the silence suddenly.

"There is a train for Spring Vale at twelve. Do you think you will be ready to travel by it? We ought to see the sights of Cape Town; but I think my father would prefer to show you those himself. I am a wretched hand at that sort of thing!"

"I had much rather go by the twelve o'clock train!"

"That's right. How much luggage have you? I must go and see about getting it through the Customs. I suppose you won't mind trusting me with your keys?"

She gave them up at once, and Dr. West jotted down the list of her boxes on a piece of paper. Then he said carelessly,—

"I suppose you will have plenty to do in saying good-bye to your friends. I will come back for you at half-past eleven."

Mrs. Ingleton seized Mona's hands when the girl came to take leave of her, and cried reproachfully,—

"My dear, why didn't you tell me you were Mr. West's niece?"

"Do you know him?"

"I have met him once or twice; but every one knows him by name. He is the chief man in Spring Vale, and his son is the cleverest doctor for miles!"

"I don't like him!" said Mona, rashly.

"He is not a lady's man!" admitted Mrs. Ingleton; "but under the circumstances what can you expect, and he has a heart of gold. He was at the Cape University with my two sons, and they both swear by him;"

Of course the "circumstances" meant his humble birth, Mona hastily decided. Aloud she asked anxiously,—

"Will you do me a favour, Mrs. Ingleton?"

"Of course I will!"

"I know very little—of my uncle or his family." Here she hesitated. "I don't like to ask my cousin, and it will be so much more comfortable to know a little before I get to Spring Vale. For instance, is there a Mrs. West, and—and—" here she blushed palpably, "does my uncle keep a shop?"

Mrs. Ingleton laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"I'm glad you came to me, Mona," she said, kindly, "for it would have been awkward for you not to know; and though I've never been to Spring Vale myself, I've heard enough from my two boys to tell you all you want to hear. Mr. West had an ostrich farm when he first came out, and later on he took to shares, like most people in Africa did about that time. He does not do anything now except attend to the affairs of the company which purchased his claims. I don't know how much money he has, but he is very rich."

"His wife died years and years ago. He has only this one son, who received the best education to be had in the colony, and then went home to walk the London hospitals. Mr. West has been a member of the Cape Parliament twice, and every one in the colony knows him—at least by name. I think you are the luckiest girl I know to be going to live with him!"

"And you won't tell anyone" pleaded Mona.

"Tell anyone you come out knowing nothing about him?" answered Mrs. Ingleton. "No! I'll keep that between ourselves, dear; and whenever your uncle

brings you to Cape Town, remember you must come and see my girls. There'll always be a welcome for you in Grave-street."

Noel's farewell to Mona was almost solemn in its earnestness. If those who believed the two almost plighted lovers could have overheard his words they would have been surprised.

"I want you to promise me one thing," said the young man, as he held the girl's hand in a close embrace. "If ever you are in any trouble or difficulty, will you write to me? If I can ever help you will you trust me to do so as gladly as though I were your brother?"

"I shall never forget your kindness," said Mona, gratefully. "Mr. Noel, if you stay long in Africa, won't you come to Spring Vale?"

He shook his head.

"I think not. Now, will you promise me if you are unhappy, if you find things less pleasant than you expect in your uncle's house, will you let me know? I—I have friends in England, and I know I could arrange a home for you there if you do not like Spring Vale!"

"It is very good of you, but——"

"I knew your father," he said, earnestly. "I may say I have been intimate with many of the Carstairs family. Will you not look on me as a friend, and give me this promise?"

And soon Mona gave it. Impressed by his earnestness she pledged herself to write to Mr. Noel if ever she needed a friend's help, and accepted his banker's address in Cape Town, where he said letters could always be forwarded to him while he remained in Africa.

"And I shall send you word myself if I return to England. There is just one thing more," he added. "Are you likely to write to Mrs. Carstairs or her daughter?"

"I do not think so."

"If you should have occasion to write do not mention my name to them. I have no unworthy motive for asking this, but I am connected in their minds with your cousin, Roland, and I know they are most anxious he should return to England. If Mrs. Carstairs heard where I was, she might write and ask me to try and influence him—and that I could not do."

"I will be sure never to mention your name; but, Mr. Noel, why does not Roland return to England? I went to Carstairs once, and it is such a beautiful place, I can't understand how anyone can stay away from such a home. The old servants are so devoted to my cousin, they quite long for his return!"

"Do they know why he left?"

"I think not. It was his old nurse told me the story. By my grandfather's will he was not to marry until he came of age, and on his twenty-first birthday he was advised to go abroad. There was a letter telling him what places he had better visit, and he was not to open it until he had left England. Roland started on his birthday, and went first to Germany, but he has never come home to Carstairs since, and he has been gone over two years now."

"I do not think he ever will return," said Noel, gravely, "but depend it, Miss Carstairs, he knows his own business best."

## CHAPTER III.

In a low Madeira chair placed in a shady corner of the wide verandah which ran round her uncle's house sat, or rather reclined, Mona Carstairs, one November afternoon.

It was the beginning of the African summer; the sky was a perfect cloudless

azure, the heat so great that Mona felt it even in her cool dress of white cambric.

All around her spoke of prosperity. The house was built on the top of a hill, and the view from the verandah was perfect; and yet it was with a sigh that Miss Carstairs closed the book she had tried so hard to read, and gave herself to a reverie.

Never had been fairy pictures so utterly mistaken as those she had drawn of her uncle and his surroundings.

Reuben West was a splendid picture of an English yeoman.

When the mortgagees foreclosed, and his parents were turned from the farm they had leased for years, he went out to the colony, because he could not bear to labour as a servant on the land where he had ruled as a master.

He worked his way to Africa because he would not rob his parents of ever so little of the pittance that remained to him.

He had been engaged on an "up country" farm as soon as he landed; in a very short time found favour in his employer's eyes, and married his daughter.

Mrs. West died at her boy's birth, and her husband had never looked at a woman's face with anything but friendship since.

He prospered apace. He spent much of his leisure in reading. He chose for his friends grave, thoughtful men, and the result was that at sixty Reuben West was a power in his adopted country.

He had a keen intelligence, and innate courtesy of manner, a clear judgment, and a ready wit.

Through all the years of his exile he had retained his old dread of fashionable society, and yet there was no drawing-room in the colony whose mistress would not have felt honoured by his presence; and his grave, thoughtful face, and snow-white hair gave him a venerable appearance even beyond his years.

It was a very silent journey that the cousins performed from Cape Town to Spring Vale.

The doctor buried himself in a medical book, and paid no attention to Mona beyond providing in every way for her comfort.

The carriage which met them at Spring Vale was a model of ease, and the horses went at a splendid pace; but even here Norman never troubled himself to talk. It was only as they passed through his father's gates that he roused himself to say gravely,—

"I hope you'll take to my father. He has been very much pleased at the thought of your coming. His great wish has always been for a daughter."

"But he has your wife?" suggested Mona, quite forgetting only her fancy had told her the doctor was a married man. She knew she had made a mistake by the shadow that crossed his face, even before he said, coldly,—

"You have been misinformed."

Mr. West was waiting in the hall, and his kiss of welcome solved Mona's doubts at once.

He, at least, was glad to have her. One look at his face, and the girl was full of a deep content. It was almost as though her own father had come back to her.

And the first impression was right. Reuben West was unfeignedly glad of the pretty, gentle girl, who soon learned to make sunshine in his home.

"You see, my dear," he told her, when she had only been a few days at Spring Vale, "I was delighted when your old schoolmistress wrote to me; but Norman made me put in that about my not liking fashionable young ladies. He declared that all English girls were stuck up and had high notions."

"You don't think me stuck-up, Uncle



Ren?" pleaded Mona, putting one soft cheek against the old gentleman's. "Do you?"

"I think you the dearest little girl in the world! How that aunt of yours could bear to part from you I can't make out."

And, thus encouraged, Mona poured out her poor little history; and Reuben West kissed her, and told her she was his own child henceforward.

"I did not half like Miss Morris writing to you," confided Mona. "It seemed like asking you to have me."

The very remark Norman had made when he read the schoolmistress's letter.

"Well, my dear, I should have asked to have you long ago, had I known of your existence! I didn't keep up much correspondence with the old country, and when I did it was my sister Susan who answered my letters, and she was so angry about your mother's marriage she never mentioned her name after it."

"I thought Aunt Susan came out to live with you?"

"So she did, but she died before she reached Cape Town. My wife was an only child, and had no relations left, so that you are actually the only kinswoman Norman has."

"And I think he'd be quite content without me," retorted Mona. "Uncle Reuben, why does Dr. West detest me so?"

"Surely you might call him Norman."

"Then why does Norman detest me?"

It was characteristic of Reuben West that he never protested Mona was mistaken.

"My boy is not used to young ladies, and does not know how to talk to them," was his reply.

"I believe he wishes I had never come."

"No. You are quite mistaken there, child; Norman is glad of anything that gives me pleasure."

And now time had passed on to the November afternoon when Mona sat on the verandah with a strange, unsatisfied expression.

She had been a month at Spring Vale, and knew everyone in the place. Her uncle petted her to her heart's content, the servants worshipped her, the neighbours were kind and friendly; in fact, the only person who seemed blind to her merits was her cousin Norman.

The doctor was the one drawback to Mona's felicity; but, unfortunately, he was a considerable one. He had an extensive practice, but his home was with his father, and Mona saw him continually.

They never advanced in the least to intimacy, but were, as cold and formal as at their first meeting. He never expressed his disapproval of anything Miss Carstairs said or did, but he had a way of lifting his eyebrows occasionally, which perfectly exasperated Mona.

He was the only person among her new surroundings who ignored her, and Mr. West's adopted darling was not nearly so meek and patient under such a slight as Miss Morris's pupil-teacher would have been.

She had a kind and generous heart; so, seeing that the subject annoyed her uncle, after that one outburst she was careful not to mention Norman's indifference to him. She reserved her little thrusts, her cool stabs for the doctor when she saw him alone, and fully hoped Mr. West had forgotten the grievance until the night before we see her dreaming on the verandah, she changed to overhear a conversation between the father and son, which robbed her of her delusion.

"She is a dear little thing!" said Mr. West, evidently speaking of his niece, and the image of her mother.

"Just about as heartless," returned the

doctor. "I believe my aunt threw over her whole family at her lover's bidding, and Miss Carstairs bids fair to emulate her."

"I think you are very hard on the poor child, Norman. What do you mean?"

"Oh there was a young fellow on board she was carrying on with nicely. The captain himself told me they all thought it would be a match, and I'm sure it looked like it."

"Well?"

"The moment she was seen with me I suppose it dawned on people to tell her of your wealth and position. My young lady sees at once a struggling artist is no fit match for her, and sends him to the right-about."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, I have seen men in love a few times," said the doctor, coolly, "and if ever a fellow was pretty far gone in the madness it was Mr. Noel. You know yourself she has never mentioned his name, and there can't be anything between them, or he would write to her."

"I don't believe your cousin is heartless," said Mr. West, firmly. "The man may have been trifling with her."

"He was not a trifler. Besides, can't you see she makes eyes at any fellow she meets?"

"That's nonsense," cried the old gentleman, fairly vexed. "She does the honours of my house very prettily, and is civil to all my guests; but if you call her manner flirting, my boy, you can't have seen much of that pastime."

"And I'm sure I don't want to," said the doctor, wearily. "We'd better not talk of her, father. We shall never agree."

"I was so glad to have her," said Mr. West, gently, "and you know, my boy, it will make no difference to you. Whenever you find a wife this house is ready for her, and I will find another home for me and my little Mona."

"I wish you wouldn't harp on my marrying!" retorted Norman. "You may live a hundred years, father, but you'll never see my wife."

"It seems a pity," said Mr. West, thoughtfully. "You are depriving yourself of a great deal of happiness."

"At any rate, I know I am not deceived. I am not being accepted for my money."

"You think too much of money, my boy," said his father, sadly.

"I often wish we had not a shilling in the world," returned Norman. "So you see, sir, so far from grudging my cousin a share of your wealth, I am very much obliged to her for lifting part of my burden off my shoulders."

And this was the conversation Mona found so difficult to understand.

Until then she had honestly believed Norman West's coldness to her was the result of avarice, that being rich himself he grudged her a share of his father's wealth. Now she could not believe this any longer. There was the ring of truth in her cousin's voice as he declared he wished he had not a shilling.

On the other charge Mona was quite easy. She knew that she had never "dropped" Mr. Noel, that, so far from scorning him when she heard of her uncle's fortune, they had parted as dear friends.

She knew, too, that she had never "flirted" in her life, if by flirting Norman meant trying to win an affection she did not intend to accept. Her cousin's taunts did not hurt her, because she felt they were false; but two things did trouble her. Was Norman right, and had Mr. Noel really loved her? And why, oh! why, did her cousin say he should never marry?

Mona decided life would be a great deal

pleasanter for her if a wife claimed all Dr. West's leisure. Perhaps, if she invited all the nicest girls in Spring Vale, and threw them in his way, he might change his mind. On the other point she was more doubtful.

She liked Mr. Noel very much. From the moment of their first meeting she had felt perfectly at ease with him, but she knew she did not love him.

Could it be love that had softened his voice whenever he spoke to her? Was it love that made him so eager for her promise to claim his aid in any trouble?

She was roused from her reverie by the noise of many footsteps, and looking over the verandah she saw two coloured servants leading Dr. West's horse, while her cousin himself followed slowly, leaning heavily on his partner's arm.

Mona was downstairs in a moment. However much she might dislike Norman she had all a true woman's sympathy for illness or trouble.

She was in the hall before the little procession arrived, and heard Dr. Beebie, the junior partner, a very quiet, studious young man, cry reassuringly,—

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Carstairs! He has had a bad fall from his horse, and his foot is sprained!"

"Broken!" came from Norman's white lips.

It was his only word, for the next moment he staggered heavily, and would have fallen had not the coloured servants, taking in the danger, left the horse to his own desires, and helped Dr. Beebie to carry their young master into the dining-room and lay him on the sofa, where he neither moved nor spoke, much to Mona's concern.

"Surely he's not dead?" she asked, anxiously.

"Dead!" exclaimed the junior partner. "Bless me, no! He's only fainted, but it might have been a bad business. What possessed him to ride that horse so near the railway I can't think. She has a frightful temper, and always goes off into tantrums at the sight of a train."

Mona stood there white and scared. She did not like to go away, but she dreaded lest her cousin should open his eyes and find her there.

Fortunately, Dr. Beebie was a most commonplace, practical young man. He rapidly decided Miss Carstairs would be a more efficient assistant than any of the servants, and so he coolly called her to help him in his proceedings, sending her for what he required as calmly as though she had been an apprentice in his surgery.

It was not very dreadful after all. The ankle was hopelessly broken, but it was soon set, and the lower part of the leg put in splints. Dr. Beebie surveyed his work with great complacency.

"It'll be a beautiful case," he said, gravely, "and West is just the fellow to set people an example. He won't go risking the use of his foot for the rest of his life by walking about too soon. He'll show people how to bear accidents. I should think you'd better have a bed made up for him in the library, Miss Carstairs. It opens into this room, you see, and the servants can wheel him in and out to meals. The driver, Moses, is a very handy fellow. I'll send him up, and he'll help the doctor to bed presently."

"Do you mean he will be ill long?" asked Mona, seriously.

"He won't be able to put his foot to the ground under a month unless he is an idiot; but as to being 'ill' he'll suffer nothing in himself. He can be carried to a sofa when he's tired of lying in bed, and West was always a great one for reading. He'll do well enough. If you want to pity anyone, Miss Carstairs, please let it be me,

I shall have all the sick people in the town on my hands, and as none of them have half the faith in me they have in my partner my life won't be very easy. I doubt if I shall be able to sit down to a meal with my wife and the chicks till West's about again."

For though only a junior partner, and possessing not a penny of private means, Dr. Beebie had been married nine years. He had five children, and a little dumping of a wife, who bored Mona excessively, and much bewildered that young lady to understand why Mrs. Beebie was the only woman in Spring Vale with whom her cousin Norman was on friendly terms.

"I really think," said Miss Carstairs, slowly, "that before you speak so certainly of his recovery you ought to bring him too. He's been insensible ever since you brought him to me."

"Oh! that was all the better while the foot was being set. Spared him a good deal of pain. We'll soon see to him now."

He applied restoratives, but Norman West was a long time in "coming to," and when he at last opened his eyes his words were strangely incoherent.

"Send her away!" he said, irritably. "You know I have prayed never to see her face again."

Dr. Beebie looked at Mona, as though to enjoin her silence. Then he said, soothingly,—

"It's all right, old fellow! She's far enough away. I think you're dreaming!"

Mona had retreated to a position behind the sofa, where the patient could not see her without turning his head.

Norman seemed to recover himself by an effort.

"Is that you, Beebie? What's up?"

"Nothing worse than a broken ankle, if you keep quiet. Who did you take me for?"

"I thought Clara was here. You see what an idiot pain makes of a man."

"She's not here nor likely to be!" returned his partner. "Now, West, I am going to leave you in your cousin's hands. I'll look in again to-night!"

Left alone there came a long silence between Mona and the invalid. At last he said, faintly,—

"Pray don't trouble yourself to stay here. I shall do very well!"

But his voice was so weak that Miss Carstairs forgot her annoyance.

"I think you ought to have something to take!" she said, briskly. "You know it is past five o'clock, and you were not in to lunch. Couldn't you swallow some soup?"

"I might."

She rang and gave the order. When it was brought she arranged the tray with deft fingers, and carried it to the sofa. Norman took all the soup, and looked at his cousin with puzzled eyes as she removed the basin.

"I should never have thought you could do that!"

"What?" laconically.

"Make one comfortable without a fuss," he retorted. "Most women go into hysterics over accidents, if they care for the injured person, and ignore the affair altogether if they don't."

"I never met any women like that," said Mona, as she deftly turned the venetian blinds to keep out the summer sunshine.

"Don't trouble to stay here," said Norman.

"Dr. Beebie said you were not to be left alone, and Uncle Reuben is out," returned Mona, quickly. "I will send in one of the servants if you prefer it, but I certainly shall not leave you alone."

"You must break it to my father gently," said Dr. West, giving up the point of her

saying. "The dear old man always works himself up into an agony if I am ill!"

"I am sure you ought not to talk," reproved his nurse.

"It won't hurt me. My foot feels on fire. There is nothing else the matter."

"So Dr. Beebie said. He seemed to pity himself a great deal more than you!"

"That is his way, to hide his feelings. He has one of the kindest hearts."

"I am sure you ought not to talk," repeated Mona.

She thought he had obeyed her, for he relapsed into silence. And she believed him sleeping, but after a while he opened his eyes, after gazing wildly round the room, cried, wildly,—

"Clara, Clara!"

Much alarmed, Mona was certainly at a loss. She felt certain he was delirious, but could not bear to call in any of the servants to listen to his secrets thus unconsciously disclosed. She did not know who Clara was or what part she had filled in Norman's life, and so she just stood by his side, unwilling to leave him alone, and yet powerless to help him.

"Clara, Clara!" called the feverish voice, "where are you? Have you forsaken me? My head is on fire, I tell you, and it is your work!"

Very gently Mona laid her cool hand on his brow, which seemed to burn her fingers, then she whispered, softly,—

"Clara is not here. Would you like her sent for?"

"I never want to see her again! Never, never! Oh, why do you look at me with her eyes! Send her away!"

"She is miles away," said Mona, repeating Dr. Beebie's words. "You may be quite certain she is not coming back!"

"She spoils my life. I forgive her that, but she has killed my faith in women! I shall never believe in one again! Never, never!"

Mona was feeling almost distraught. It was an untold relief to her when the door opened, and her uncle entered. He had met Dr. Beebie, and had heard from him of the accident, so the worst of her task was spared poor Mona.

"I am so glad you have come," she whispered. "He has been talking so wildly. I did not know what to do."

"Light-headed," said Mr. West, sadly, "but that is not unusual with him! I never met anyone with such a tendency to fever, and the moment it attacks him he is delirious!"

They stood together, uncle and niece, watching Norman's fevered tossing. He did not speak connectedly again, only now and again, by bending over him, the two anxious watchers could catch the one word,—

"Clara!"

"Who was she?" asked Mona.

"The curse of his life," answered Reuben West, bitterly. "She was Kate Beebie's sister, but as unlike her as darkness from light. She and my boy were lovers, their wedding-day fixed, when she met some Englishmen at her aunt's house in Cape Town. One of them was a lord, and that girl would have sold her soul for a title. She slipped out unknown to her friends, and married him at the Cathedral one morning. Then they went on board the steamer and sailed for England the same day."

"Until the ship stopped at Madeira, and an acquaintance of ours, who happened to be on board, cabled out the news, we knew nothing of it. Norman sought her frantically, believing she had met with some accident. When her treachery was known here it almost cost her sister's life, and it changed my boy from a joyous light-hearted young fellow to the grave, studious man he is now!"

The tears stood in Mona's eyes.

"And he hates all women!" she said, brokenly. "No wonder, after such a betrayal!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

MRS. CARSTAIRS replied to Miss Morris's letter courteously enough, saying she was much obliged to that lady for taking her troublesome niece off her hands. Then in a postscript, as though a mere afterthought, she asked whether Miss Morris knew of any young lady of position needing a refined home and fashionable society.

Down went the corners of Miss Morris's mouth as she read these lines.

"Then I was right, and she has been living beyond her income, and is in difficulties. Well, I'm sorry for her, but as to trusting any girl I cared for to her tender mercies that's quite a different thing. She had better secure a rich son-in-law as soon as possible. Why doesn't Sir Ronald come home to marry his cousin if they 'understand each other?'"

That was what a great many other people were asking, the Miss Carstairs among the rest.

"You know, mamma," said Maude, the eldest of the trio, a haughty young woman of twenty-five, "Roland never said anything definite, and I really think it would be better to write to him and ask his intentions. Mary might have married Mr. Fortescue last year if she hadn't been so full of being 'my lady.' Eight hundred a year is not to be despised."

But unfortunately the rejected swain had gone elsewhere for consolation, and found it.

The truth came sadly home to Mrs. Carstairs. Her youngest girl had been "out" three years. Maude, the eldest, had seen seven seasons, and yet the only ghost of an offer either of them had received was the one she had allowed Mary to refuse because it came from someone "connected with trade."

"We can't go on like this much longer," said the widow, with a groan. "I have spent every penny your father left me. I am in debt on every side, and have nothing in the world to depend upon but my pension, which is only four hundred a-year."

"It's shameful!" said Mary, groaning.

"Roland ought never to have deceived me."

"Are you sure you didn't deceive yourself?" demanded Maude coldly. "I never noticed Roland paid you any particular attention. You were nearest to him in age, and so got paired off with him as children, but I never heard of anything else."

"He said he must go away because it was dangerous to stay," said Mary, desperately, "and he asked me always to think of him kindly."

"That doesn't imply he means to marry you," retorted Maude. "I think you have behaved like a simpleton."

"Come, girls, quarrelling won't mend matters," said their mother, with a sigh. "Just tell me what is to be done?"

"I shall write to Roland," said Maude, slowly.

"I don't think you are the proper person," objected Mary. "You were never his favourite."

"No, we squabbled continually, and so he can't think I am trying to catch him," said Miss Carstairs, with profound contempt for her sister. "I shall tell him mother's affairs are hopelessly entangled, and that as she has no son to help her she would be grateful if he could come and talk over things with her. But that if it is impossible for him to come to England it would be a great convenience to us to have the use of Carstairs Place for a few months."

"I thought we had the use of it?" ob-



jected Alice. "Didn't little Mona stay there ever so long?"

"We have the use of it so far that three rooms are kept aired in case we want them. But I don't mean that at all. If we go to Carstairs it must be with proper style, and power to throw the whole house open and entertain."

"But that would cost a lot."

"Roland, of course, would pay his own tradespeople, and I expect when ours heard we were living at the Place they would soon grow less threatening. Why, our cousin has ten thousand a year if he has a penny."

"Double that," put in Mrs. Carstairs. "His mother was an heiress. Roland must have a princely income, and being the last male heir, everything is in his power."

"Does that make any difference?"

"Yes. Your grandfather entailed the property on the eldest of his three sons, and his descendants, but failing a direct male heir the reigning baronet was to have power to bequeath everything as he chose. It is a burning shame! As if Roland died childless you girls would be his natural heiresses."

"Hardly that," said Maude, who was very precise, "for Mona's father was older than papa. But it doesn't matter, mamma. Roland is sure to marry. Eligible young men always do."

The letter was written and despatched early in January (it was the arrival of the Christmas bills that had roused Mrs. Carstairs to the desperate condition of her affairs). It was sent to Sir Roland's lawyer, who was supposed always to have the baronet's address, accompanied by a polite note, urging speed in despatching it.

Mr. Tweedy answered by return of post. He had sent on Mrs. Carstairs' letter, but he feared some time might elapse before a reply could arrive, as his client was out of Europe.

"That's vague," said Maude, as she tossed the note into the wastepaper basket. "Really one would think Roland was a criminal flying from justice. He has been gone three years, and we have never had a definite address where we could write to him."

Two days later Mr. Tweedy's card was brought to the ladies as they sat at work. Mrs. Carstairs declared Sir Roland must have come home. Her daughters thought the lawyer brought a message from him, but all felt that no light cause had made the lawyer leave his office, and come up to South Kensington in the busiest part of the morning.

He was shown into them as they sat, for as not one of the girls would have heard of being excluded from the audience, it seemed useless for him to be asked into another room.

It chanced that he had never met Mrs. Carstairs or her daughters. In fact, Roland had behaved rather strangely on coming of age, and dismissing his grandfather's lawyer had confided the entire management of his affairs to Mr. Tweedy, of whom no one had heard anything except that his son had been Roland's chum at college.

The lawyer was a man of fifty turned, shrewd and clear-headed. He probably took in a great deal of the characters of his new acquaintance, for he wasted no time in idle small talk, but went direct to the purpose.

"I am sorry to say, madam, that I am the bearer of ill news. I heard this morning of my client's death. Sir Ronald Carstairs died at Cape Town on the tenth of December, of typhus fever, and the information has just reached me!"

The one thought in all those minds was, to whom had the dead man left his wealth, or—and this was a terrible idea—had he

died intestate, and if so, could Mona's claims outweigh theirs?

"I had no idea Roland was in Africa," said his aunt at last. "What in the world took him there, away from all his kindred?"

"I rather fancy, poor fellow," said the lawyer, feelingly, "that his one object in leading a life of constant change was to prevent himself from forming any strong attachment, for under his painful circumstances he felt marriage would be a sin!"

Four pairs of eyes looked at Mr. Tweedy in bewilderment.

"Painful circumstances! Why, he had twenty thousand a year!"

"And would have given every penny of it to have changed places with his meanest servant. Surely, Mrs. Carstairs, you must have heard of the family skeleton?"

"I know that Reginald Carstairs and his wife, Lady Adela, were grievously unhappy," said the widow in a puzzled tone. "She was beautiful and high-born. She brought him a noble fortune, and loved him dearly. Why their marriage was a failure always bewildered me."

"She is dead now, and her son rests in peace, so it can hurt no one to speak the truth. Lady Adela Carstairs died a raving lunatic. Her mother was insane, and she had been subject to fits of dementia from a child. Sir Reginald did his utmost for his grandson. He guarding against his learning even a hint of the fatal secret till he was of age. Then he caused the truth to be disclosed to him in a letter written by himself. In that letter, Mrs. Carstairs, your father-in-law urged his heir never to marry unless he felt absolutely certain he had not inherited his mother's curse!"

"He did not inherit it," said Mrs. Carstairs, sharply. "Roland had the sweetest temper."

"But subject from childhood to fits of gloom, which amounted almost to melancholia. He saw the first physicians for mental disorders in London and Paris, and all said the same thing. He might live to a good old age and never develop his mother's malady; but the seeds of it were dormant in his constitution, and any trouble or sudden shock would bring them into life. In my opinion, after listening to such a verdict, Sir Roland was right in taking (as he did the day he heard it) a solemn oath that nothing would induce him to marry."

"But to be cut off like that in the prime of his youth, it sounds terrible!" objected Mrs. Carstairs.

"Better so than to live and become a lunatic. Believe me, madam, he thought so. The one wish of his heart was to die young."

"And he expected it?" asked Mrs. Carstairs. "I have often heard him speak as a child as though he never fancied himself old."

"He did expect it!" said the lawyer, quietly. "The day after he came of age he made a will (he was then travelling with my son) and sent it to me. It has been in my keeping ever since, and I never heard him express a wish to alter its disposition of his property; but the letter received this morning distinctly states that he made a second will at the commencement of his illness, which revokes the one in my possession."

"Who wrote it to you?" asked Maude, abruptly.

"A Captain Peters. He commands one of the steamers sailing between Southampton and the Cape. I believe your cousin had travelled on his ship more than once. He writes of him with great feeling, and says that, as he hopes to be in England within a fortnight of his letter, he would prefer not to enter into business matters,

but intends to call on me with the will and other legal documents as soon as he reaches London."

"I daresay he has prevailed on Roland to leave him everything," said Mrs. Carstairs, spitefully. "Such a will made when the poor fellow was dying ought not to be allowed to stand."

"In that case one of your daughters would suffer," said the lawyer, dryly, "for she is his heiress."

"I thought you did not know the contents of the will," said Maude, sharply.

"Nor do I. Captain Peters specially says he prefers not to enter into details; but then, as an afterthought, he adds that to save any disappointment he thinks it best to state that Sir Roland's chief heiress is his cousin Mona. Which of you young ladies am I to congratulate?"

But, alas, neither of the three looked in a case for felicitation. If ever envy, hatred, and malice were stamped plainly on girls' faces, all these were written on those of the Misses Carstairs.

## CHAPTER V.

NORMAN WEST did not die, though he was in a good deal more danger than his father had expected at first. He had led such an active, outdoor existence that the confinement had tried him terribly; and, besides the broken ankle, colonial fever seized on him and held him tightly in its cruel grip, so that for three or four weeks after that terrible November afternoon, Mr. West's beautiful home was the abode of mourning and anxiety for his only son, tossed in all the wild delirium of fever, rarely being conscious all through that time, and only tranquil when in the stupor of exhaustion.

In vain good Dr. Beebie declared Norman would pull through. In vain his cheery little wife told Mona, in confidence, she had seen him far worse at the time of her sister's treachery.

Mona and her uncle worked themselves into a terrible state of anxiety, until, as the doctor told them good-naturedly they were doing their best to make three invalids instead of one.

Mona was head nurse—a rather peculiar arrangement, since in health the cousin's had never been on cordial terms, and all the feminine population of Spring Vale were dying to wait on the handsome doctor; but from the moment of discovering his boy's ravings were less violent when Mona's voice soothed him, Mr. West had installed his niece in supreme authority, and she was too fond of the kind old man not to do her utmost for his son. It was entirely for her uncle's sake, she told herself. Besides, the story of "Clara" had softened her animosity against Norman. After suffering so cruelly through a woman's treachery he seemed to have earned a right to disparage the whole sex.

In fact, Mona's thoughts of "Clara" were harder than any she had cherished against her cousin.

She had all the instincts of sick nurse, as, indeed, most true women have. It was quite impossible to go on hating anyone so completely at her mercy.

The old housekeeper, who had brought up Norman from babyhood, was a ready assistant; but even Mrs. Rolph admitted she could do nothing with her young master compared with his cousin.

The crisis came at last, and Norman was pronounced on the road to recovery. The fever light died out of his eyes. His ravings ceased, but he was weak and helpless as a child.

The first sign he gave of returning to himself was that his manner to Mona entirely changed. From always fretting if she left the room for an hour, and refusing to take

food from any other hand, he ceased to notice her absence, and seemed equally indifferent to her presence. He never showed any pleasure in her little attentions. It was as though he had gone back to his old distrust.

Mona was divided in feeling on this sudden change. As a sign that Norman was recovering, she hailed it joyfully, but it hurt her to the quick to be scorned by one to whom, through so many anxious days and weeks, she had seemed absolutely indispensable. Good old Reuben West, who saw how her colour went and came in Norman's presence, took an opportunity to apologize for his son's ingratitude; but it was Dr. Beebie who remonstrated with the patient himself.

"Well, on the whole, West, I think you are the most ungracious fellow I ever had to do with, and I have seen a good many!" he said, one morning in December, when Norman's sofa had been wheeled on to the verandah for the first time, and he had answered some congratulatory remark of his cousin's with something like a grunt, sending her away with a tear in her eye, that did not escape Dr. Beebie's notice.

"You'd be ungracious if you'd been laid by like a log for five weeks!" was the quick reply, "but really, Beebie, I do know I have been an awful nuisance to you, and as soon as I am fit to go about without scaring the patients, I'll take them all off your hands, and you shall have as long a holiday as you like!"

"As though I complained of sick people's conduct to me," said Dr. Beebie, sharply. "Besides, we are old friends and comrades, and I was bound to do my best for you; but you don't owe your life to me, West, but I verily believe to your cousin's nursing!"

"Rubbish!"

"Miss Carstairs has tended you as devotedly as though you had been her brother, and you treat her—well, considerably worse than if she was one of your father's servants!"

"I'm sure I wish she had spared her trouble," said Norman, wearily. "I don't know that I care much about life!"

"That is cowardly!"

"Oh, of course, you can talk. You've one of the sweetest wives in the world, and—"

"And she is sister of the falsest woman I ever knew," remarked the other doctor, coolly. "If that does not convince you all women are not heartless, because you happen to have stumbled across a bad specimen, I know nothing that will!"

"I meet nothing but bad specimens."

"Pray, are you still fretting after Lady Mervyn?" asked Beebie, who felt the time had come for plain-speaking. "I believe she contemplates a divorce, so you might have a chance of succeeding the Earl!"

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"By no means. I want to find out as your doctor, and still more as your friend, what you are grizzling over, or what makes you so savage with us all."

"I wouldn't marry Lady Mervyn if she came to me a widow, and implored me on her bended knees. I can't think what makes you imagine I am fretting over her."

"Because you raved of hardly anything else while you were ill," said his friend, dryly. "I can assure you, poor Miss Carstairs must have grown quite weary of Clara's name!"

"They are very much alike," said Norman, dreamily.

"Alike! No two women were more different. Clara was a born coquette. Your cousin is just a simple, true-hearted girl. I'm sure, Norman, you treat her shamefully."

"I don't like her!"

"Why not? Surely you can't be jealous of her share of your father's heart?"

"No. The old man enjoys her society intensely, but she is false as she is fair! Before ever she came to Spring Vale, Beebie, I understood that much!"

"Indeed! Well, I think you were mistaken. My wife is not often wrong, and she is quite in love with your cousin!"

"Doesn't she see the resemblance to her sister?"

"Of course not. No one does but you."

"I wish I had been a poor man," said Norman, fretfully, "then I might have made something of my life. Now I shall never believe any woman accepted me for anything but my wealth."

Mona did not come back to the verandah. In truth, Dr. Beebie met her as she was leaving the house, told her she looked like a little ghost, and insisted on carrying her off to spend the rest of the day at his house.

"Do you think Norman is going to have a relapse?" asked Miss Carstairs, anxiously, as they drove off. "He seems to be very low this morning."

"Convalescents are often fretful. I've been giving him a good scolding. You yield to his whims too much. He would be better if you sat upon him sometimes."

"But I don't know how to—and I feel so sorry for him."

"My dear Miss Carstairs, you need not be. He'll be as strong as ever in a month."

"You know that is not what I mean. His heart is broken by her treachery."

"His heart is not broken in the least, and he would not marry Lady Mervyn if she were a widow to-morrow. The truth is, Miss Carstairs, he has grown almost morbid on the subject. He distrusts every woman because one jilted him. He wants a remedy I can't give him."

"What is it, doctor?"

The doctor carefully avoided meeting Mona's eyes as he answered,—

"To fall desperately in love. Nothing else will cure him of his absurd fancies."

Mona spent the rest of the day at the Beebie's, and her cousin found the hours drag far more than usual. His father sat with him all the afternoon, and even volunteered to read the paper. But his voice was monotonous, and the invalid stopped him.

Mrs. Rolph came in for a share of his complaints. The tea was smoky, and she touched his injured foot when she removed the tray (both imaginary complaints). He furthermore refused to be wheeled indoors, and would not hear of going to bed at his usual time.

"Well, I wish Miss Mona was here," said the irate housekeeper, who, having been the invalid's nurse from his babyhood, did not scruple to speak her mind. "She bears all your tantrums like an angel, but I don't mean to. I'd sooner have to tend a sick bear than you."

Norman smiled in spite of himself.

"Where is Mona, by the way?"

"Gone to Mrs. Beebie's, and it's time she did have a change somewhere, poor dear young lady, for you've worn her to skin and bone nearly with your tantrums. And, really, Mr. Norman, what we're to do without Miss Mona when she goes I can't think. The master's as mopey as possible because he had his tea without her. When she's married the house'll be as dull as ditch water, and yet she's too bonny to be an old maid."

Norman declined to give an opinion on this point. He went off to bed at nine o'clock in the worst possible humour, and even then Mona had not returned.

Perhaps Dr. Beebie's advice that the

patient should be judiciously thwarted a little influenced Miss Carstairs, for she grew rather lax in her attentions. She began to make her uncle her first care, as she had done before the accident, and either by accident or design for three whole days she was never entirely *tit-a-tot* with Norman.

But Dr. West did not like the new arrangement, and by having his sofa wheeled on the verandah an hour earlier than usual on the fourth morning, he came upon Mona feeding the canaries and singing almost as blithely as themselves.

"Why do you never come near me?" Dr. West asked, rather sulkily, when the "boy" who pushed his sofa had retired.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought you had had rather an overdose of my society."

"Do you know Beebie says you saved my life?"

"He happens to be a great friend of mine, so you must allow for a little exaggeration."

"I don't believe you care a bit."

"I do," said Mona, slowly. "I think if anything had happened to you it would have broken your father's heart."

"You could have consoled him."

"You overrate my powers," said Mona, cheerfully. "But as you are almost well again we need not discuss that. Dr. Beebie says you will be as strong as ever in a month."

"He's an idiot!"

"You seem fond of that expression," said Mona, coolly. "Do you know, Norman, when I first saw you on board the *Grecian* before I knew who you were, I told Mr. Noel you looked terribly bad-tempered—and I rather think I was right."

"I wonder you like to mention his name."

"Why? He was very kind to me."

"And you treated him shamefully."

Mona opened her eyes.

"I don't think he would say so. We were great friends. He had known my father long ago, and when we parted Mr. Noel made me promise if ever I was in any trouble to write to him. It seems strange," she went on, dreamily, "but though I had only seen him those three weeks I felt as though I had known him all my life."

Norman stared at her.

"You sound as if you meant it," he said, bitterly; "but perhaps you are only deceiving me. Can you look me in the face and say that you were not engaged to Noel?"

"Most certainly," said Mona, quietly. "To begin with, he never wished to marry me, and to go on with, I am old-fashioned and believe in love. I liked Mr. Noel extremely. I trusted him as if he had been my brother, but I—did not love him."

Norman looked amazed.

"I thought you were engaged, and that when you found out my father's wealth you thought you might look higher, and so cast him off."

Mona had grown pale as death.

"I shall ask Uncle Reuben to pay my passage back to England," she said, slowly, "and go to Miss Morris. I am stronger than I used to be, and perhaps she would let me be one of her teachers again now. I can't stay in this house."

"Why not? My father worships you."

"And you grudge me his every kindness. You think me a heartless coquette, who gave up a good man's love for the sake of being the *protégée* of rich relations. If I had cared for Mr. Noel—like that, and he had asked me, I should have married him if he had been as poor as a church mouse."

"You mustn't go," said Norman, passionately. "My father could never spare you. I could not."



"You would be delighted to get rid of me. You hate me."

"I have tried hard enough to," he answered, "and the result is that I love you better than anything in the world. Mona, if I shunned you it was because I knew my own danger. I have known for days that you were more precious to me than aught on earth."

"Dr. Beebie said nothing would cure you of your morbid fancies but falling in love. I agree with him then," said Mona, demurely, "but I object to the form in which you have taken the prescription."

"Mona!"

"We should be miserable!" said the girl, gravely. "Your suspicions would make my life a torture."

"Do you believe I love you?" he demanded, passionately.

"I think it costs you too much to confess it for you to say it if it were not true."

"And do you hate me?"

"One does not hate one's cousins."

"That won't do! Mona, I will be answered. I mean to know! Do you hate me?"

"Not particularly."

"Then will you go a step farther, and try to love me? Mona," as he caught a strange look in her beautiful face, "do you mean that you care already, that in trying to save my worthless life you have grown to like me?"

Mona's face was hidden, but Dr. West persisted in his question.

"I could not help it," she said at last, blushing crimson. "I was so sorry for you, and so angry with that Clara!"

"I have forgiven Clara weeks ago! If you were angry with her, Mona, you must not follow her example by trying to make me miserable!"

"I want you to be happy!"

"And I can't be happy without you! Mona, I have treated you like a brute, but I love you dearly!"

"I believe love often begins with a little aversion," said Mona, gravely. "Perhaps, in your case, it will also end with it!"

"Mona!"

"You must never speak of this again!"

"But why not?"

"Because it is impossible!"

"You confess you love me?" he persisted.

"I am afraid I do; but there is a great barrier between us. You are rich, I am penniless. You are the most doubting man I ever heard of; and, if I married you, in a few weeks you would persuade yourself your fortune had bought me! I had rather not risk it, Cousin Norman!"

"Mona!"

"I can't help it!" said the girl, decidedly. "If you began to doubt me after I was your wife you would break my heart, and so I won't give you the chance of saying I married you for your money!"

The servant interrupted their *tête-à-tête* by bringing Mona a card.

"Captain Peters!" she exclaimed. "I know the *Grecian* was in Table Bay. How very kind of him to come, especially as they sail to-morrow!"

But it was no call of mere friendship. Captain Peters had been summoned the day before, when his ship reached Table Bay, to the death-bed of Mr. Noel, otherwise Sir Roland Noel Carstairs.

He had received his dying wishes, and taken charge of his last will.

By some mistake another vessel had been "put on" instead of the *Grecian* for the next voyage, and so her captain had a fortnight of comparative freedom, and the first use he made of it was to come to Spring Vale, and tell Mona of the wondrous change in her fortunes, since the dead man had

left her everything he had, save a small provision for his servants.

It was much the same story as Mr. Tweedy had carried to her cousins, only there was an addition they would never would never know.

"I believe that had the poor fellow felt free to marry he would have begged you to be his wife," said Captain Peters, kindly, "and this much I may tell you, he loved you with all his heart and strength. Your name was the last on his lips!"

"Oh! why did he not tell me he was my cousin?"

"Poor fellow! He thought it easier to keep his oath if he never used his title. For the same reason he never betrayed his wealth. Most people thought him a needy artist."

"I know. My cousin, Dr. West, did."

"Ah!" Captain Peters was not blind to the crimson blush on the girl's face.

"He's a fine fellow. Don't you think so? And so he fancied poor Noel was a struggling artist. Perhaps he went a little further, and thought you were lovers. Do you know, Miss Carstairs, every one on board saw the poor fellow's devotion to you? Had you been one whit less simple and unconscious you must have seen it for yourself."

Mona's eyes were full of tears.

"Uncle is out," she said, gently; "but my cousin is on the verandah. He would like to see you!"

Captain Peters followed her through the glass doors, and took a seat at the invalid's side. The sailor had seen quite enough to guess at the romance going on at Spring Vale, so when Mona had vanished he was not disappointed at the question,—

"What have you been saying to her? She was crying!"

"I only came to tell her of a noble heart who died blessing her, and to tell her that her sweet, girlish faith and friendship had brought a little brightness into a sorely-burdened life!"

"You mean Noel! I always said he cared for her. Why didn't he tell her so?"

The captain explained, but—perhaps from design—forgot to add that Miss Carstairs was Sir Rowlands' sole heiress. Presently, when Mr. West had come in and taken the visitor to see the garden, Mona came softly back.

"His was a more unselfish love than mine," said Norman, gravely. "Dear," taking her hand, tenderly, "don't you think you can trust me? If not I believe I shall have to petition the dear old man to leave all his money-bags to someone else. I can do without riches, but I cannot give up Mona!"

"I don't think you will have to try," said Mona, softly. "since I know how Roland thought of me I feel brave. Norman, if you wish it still I will risk even your fancying that I have accepted you for your money!"

\* \* \* \* \*

When Norman West heard the truth, and knew that Mona had been conscious of her wealth when she gave him her promise, he declared he had been taken in, and that she would be doubting him now; but Mona said, gravely, she did not care for money, but she was glad he could never suspect her of mercenary thoughts.

"Hem!" said Dr. Beebie, when he had heard of the engagement, "it's the best news you could have told me, but you had got things to a pretty deadlock, young people! Please remember twenty thousand a-year does not always come to young ladies who are afraid to accept a rich suitor because he has more money than themselves."

Reuben West was delighted, and urged a speedy wedding, but Mona wished to wait until Roland's grave was not so freshly made. And thus it came about that the marriage was delayed till March, and then the bridal pair went to England for their honeymoon, to inspect the glories of Carstairs' Place and to make a provision for Mona's aunt and cousins.

Norman called this provision "coals of fire," but in his heart he was proud that his wife's first use of her prosperity should be to benefit the relations who had shown her so little kindness. An annuity of five hundred pounds was settled on "Aunt Mary," and a portion of five thousand pounds promised to each of her daughters when they married (those three portions are still unclaimed).

The pleasantest visit of all was paid to St. Ronan's. Fortunately Easter fell late, and the school was still enjoying holidays, so that there was nothing indecorous in the presence of the bridal pair.

"Wonders will never cease," said Miss Morris, as she kissed her ex-pupil teacher. "Why, Dr. West, what strange changes happen! It is not a year since I went to Petherton place to tell Mrs. Carstairs of Mona's failure, and listened to her complaints at being burdened with a poor relation!"

[THE END.]

## CHANGES.

Whom we first love, you know, we seldom wed,

Time rules us all. And life, indeed is not  
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead;

And then we women cannot choose our lot.

Much must be borne that it is hard to bear;  
Much given away that were sweet to keep;

God help us all! who need, indeed, His care,

And yet, I know, the Shepherd loves His sheep.

My little boy begins to babble now

Upon my knee his earliest infant prayer,  
He has his father's eager eyes, I know.

And, they say, too, his mother's sunny hair.

But when he sleeps and smiles upon my knee,

And I can feel his light breath come and go,

I think of one (Heaven help and pity me!)  
Who loved me, and whom I loved, long ago.

Who might have been—ah, what I dare not think!

We all are changed: God judges for us best,

God help us to do our duty, and not shrink,  
And trust in Heaven humbly for the rest.

But blame us women not, if some appear

Too cold at times, and some too gay and light,

Some griefs gnaw deep, some woes are hard to bear;

Who knows the past, and who can judge us right?

Ah, were we judged by what we might have been;

And not by what we are, too apt to fall!

My little child—he sleeps and smiles between

These thoughts and me. In heaven we shall know all.

# Guy Forrester's Secret.

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON.

Author of "IVY'S PERIL," "DOLLY'S LEGACY," "DOROTHY'S HEARTACHE," &c.

## SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Guy Forrester has been disappointed in love through his uncle, Lord Munro, having married when everyone thought that Guy was the only heir to the title and estates. This double disappointment makes Guy reckless, and he is on the point of putting an end to his life when a good angel, in the person of Mr. Smith, comes to his assistance. Mr. Smith makes one stipulation to which Guy agrees, and shortly afterwards Guy leaves England to start life afresh in some distant land. The woman who is really responsible for Guy's misfortunes married a Mr. Jenkins, but the end of the first chapter finds her a penniless widow. James Smith is dead, and Guy returns to England to find that the whole of his fortune has been left to him on the understanding that he looks after Mr. Smith's dear granddaughter, and makes her happy. Anastasia Smith resents being handed over to a man as if she were a parcel or portmanteau, and steadfastly refuses to allow Guy to assist her in any way. The fates in their courses, however, are bringing these two people unwittingly together, and the next chapters will reveal the real identity of Poppie, to whom Guy rendered so useful a service when they both found themselves locked in the cemetery.

## CHAPTER VI.

**L**ADY MUNRO felt a weight lifted from her heart when Sir Ira Vernon placed her little daughter in her arms; but though Dolly was her only child she was not a selfish mother, and so soon as she had discovered her little girl was uninjured her thoughts flew to Poppie.

"Where is Miss Smith? Oh I surely, Sir Ira, she went with Dolly?"

"A— a young lady was there," said Sir Ira, simply; "but she looked a mere child."

Lady Munro smiled.

"Yes, she always does look about seventeen. But, tell me, was she hurt?"

"Forrester stayed with her; he thought she had fainted. You see, her arms were cramped with holding the child, and she had taken off her furs to wrap her in."

The countess hurried away to order fires, hot water, and such-like appliances.

Meanwhile, Sir Ira Vernon felt, with a strange pang at his heart, he would gladly have changed places with Guy Forrester, and stayed out in the raw coldness of the November night, if by so doing he could have ministered to the comfort of pretty, bright-haired Poppie.

Mr. Forrester was puzzled when the dark eyes closed, and Poppie relapsed into unconsciousness; but he never imagined the revelation of his own identity could have brought on a second swoon.

He bent over the girl, tenderly chafed her ice-cold hands in his, poured a few drops of stimulant from a pocket flask between her clenched teeth, and succeeded so well that at last, with a fluttering sigh, the spirit came back to its prison house.

Poppie half raised her head, and bent her beautiful eyes on his face with a strange dumb pathos.

"You won't tell anyone?"

Utterly bewildered as to what it was he must keep so secret Guy tried to reassure by promises that he would do nothing without her consent.

"You will never have that," said the girl, fiercely; "never while I live!"

Then the fire faded out of her eyes, and to his dismay they filled with tears.

"Everything is very miserable," said Poppie, decidedly. "Why don't you leave me here to die? It would be much better."

"Because I decidedly object to assist in murdering you. Have you forgotten our first meeting, Poppie?"

For a moment her face brightened.

"Where was it?"

"Then, you have forgotten! It was in a lonely cemetery not three weeks ago."

The half smile was a whole one now. Poppie looked like a creature relieved from an awful dread. She gave a sigh of relief.

"I remember all about it now. I'm afraid you thought me very rude and ungrateful?"

"I could not expect you to remember."

"But I did," ruefully. "Why, Mr. Forrester, when I told my friend about it she was horrified. She gave up all hopes of me upon the spot. She said I should never make a strong-minded woman."

"Would a strong-minded woman have spent the night in a cemetery, then?"

"No," said Poppie, wickedly; "but having once made use of you to escape from her prison she would have declined your further society. I explained we both wished to go to the railway-station, and there was but one road. I thought that an unanswerable reason."

"And wasn't it?"

"No. She said I might have walked on one side of the way and you on the other."

"I fancy I should have declined. But I must not keep you here in the damp and cold. I am sure Lady Munro must be very anxious about you."

Poppie replied,

"I expect she will send me away."

"Send you away!"

"And I shall quite deserve it. You see, Mr. Forrester, she trusted me with the most precious thing she had—Dollie—and I have neglected her."

"Dollie is safe enough, and unless my aunt is a much crueler woman than she looks you are quite mistaken in your fears. But," here his voice softened strangely, "don't go wandering about like a little stray sheep again, for I might not always be here to come to the rescue."

"I think that is just what I am."

"Meaning what?"

"A little stray sheep. You know there is always a black sheep in every family. Well, I am the one in ours."

"Oh, nonsense! Now, I am not going to let you catch your death by moralising in the cold. You must get up and come home."

"But I can't."

"You must," coaxingly. "I assure you Lady Munro will not be angry with you."

"It is not that; but I can't get up—my feet feel all stiff and cramped."

With the utmost gentleness Guy raised her to a standing posture; but he saw at once she was quite right. She could not move either foot, and the attempt to do so brought on a moan of pain which wrung Guy's very heart.

"You must let me carry you," he said, cheerfully, "then we shall soon be at the Castle."

"Oh, I couldn't!"

"Nonsense! We are close to the entrance to the woods. It is no distance."

"But I am so heavy."

"I don't believe it. Now, give in, like a good child. You can't walk, and I am certainly not going to leave you here all night."

"I should do very well."

"I decline to make the experiment. I do believe you are afraid I shall drop you."

"I am not," indignantly.

"Then you are thinking of your friend—

"Stacy" don't you call her?—and how awfully she would disapprove of your accepting my aid; but, you see, she need never know of it, and, if she did—as you say, she gave up all hopes of you after our meeting in the cemetery—she can't be very much surprised."

He did not wait for a reply. Gathering the small figure in his arms he raised his burden carefully, and set out on his walk.

Poppie's brain was a perfect chaos; but perhaps the two prevalent thoughts were surprise at the strange chance which brought Guy Forrester a second time to her assistance, and a wonder what Stacy would say could her strong-minded eyes possibly be scandalised by the spectacle of Poppie's mode of progress.

"It seems just as though I did it on purpose," she said at last, gravely.

"Did what?"

"Got into scrapes for you to get me out."

"I will acquit you of all such intention, as far as I am concerned; but I do think—and I believe I said so before—you don't take half enough care of yourself. Perhaps when you grow older—"

"Oh, don't!" interrupted Poppie, pathetically. "Please don't talk of my growing old. I can't bear to think of it."

"I didn't mean old. I was only going to say when you were quite grown up—"

"I haven't grown an inch for years."

"Oh, child, what a reasoner you are!"

"And I am not a child!"

"How old are you?"

But Poppie evaded the question.

"I am younger than you."

"I should rather think so! I am within a month of thirty-three."

"So Lady Munro said. She was telling me about you yesterday."

"What did she tell you?"

Poppie felt she had made a mistake.

"Only what everyone knows. That you had just come back from Maryland, and she hoped you would settle in England."

"Only that?"

Silence.

"Did she tell you what happened before I went to Maryland?"

"She said you had had a great deal of trouble, and she hoped you would be happier now. She has a plan to make you so," went on Poppie, forgetting the said plan was her own suggestion rather than Lady Munro's.

Guy looked at the fair face so near his own half curiously.

"I understand. She has told you about Mrs. Jenkins."

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Of course I was very sorry for you."

"Thank you."

"But I said as Mr. Jenkins was dead—"

"Don't!" said Guy, sharply. "Child, take my advice, and steer clear of matchmaking; it is the most cruel pastime any human creature can indulge in."

"Is it!"

"You will find it out some day, when your friends make little plans for you."

"They won't," said Poppie, indignantly. "Why, I have no intimate friends, but Stacy, and she despises all women who marry. She says it's a sign of weakness."

Poppie did not speak again. The pretty head leant wearily on Guy Forrester's shoulder, and he felt, rather than saw the eyes were closed.

He hurried on, reproaching himself for tiring her with conversation.

"It is the strangest thing I ever knew," he muttered to himself. "I have eluded all the dear old chief's plans for my subjection; I have steered safely through all the mazes of colonial society, and I haven't





KNEELING ON THE OAKEN FLOOR, HER FACE BURIED IN HER HANDS,.....WAS A SLENDER FEMALE FORM.

been a week in England before I meet this child. Then she disappears, and as I don't even know her surname I imagine it only a passing episode. When coming to my uncle's—the house he says is to be my home—I find her installed there as one of the family. It must be fate. Well, so long as she never guesses I admire her, I don't see why we should not be friends. She herself does not believe in love, so she is not likely to divine my secret."

The reverie lasted till they were at the Castle steps. Lady Munro and the family doctor were in the hall, and under their auspices Poppie was carried upstairs, and the rest of the party sat down to the long neglected dinner, which the sorely-tried cook had been endeavouring to keep presentable for the last two hours.

The Countess returned before they had finished the fish, and said Poppie was in bed. The doctor had given her a composing draught, and promised to call the first thing in the morning.

"I am glad he does not think it serious," said the Earl, warmly. "She is such a pretty child she creeps into one's heart."

"Has she been with you long?" asked Sir Ira, with a great deal more interest than Guy thought necessary.

He listened anxiously for the answer, though he knew already what it would be.

"Barely a fortnight. My lady came to the conclusion Dollie must have a governess, and we advertised in the *Times*. We choose Miss Smith for a most romantic reason. Her letter had a deep black border, and my wife would believe anyone who had lost someone near and dear to them must be nice. I must say it has turned out successfully; but we were all relieved when we saw Miss Smith. Her references praised

her learning with such profound respect we rather expected to see a sallow, spectacled young person, with a contempt for anything beyond the ologies and sciences taught at Girton."

"Is Miss Smith a Girton Girl?"

"She is. I think myself she is a very pretty specimen of a 'sweet girl graduate,' but I own one would never suspect from her manners and conversation that she was such a thorough blue stocking."

"How old is she?"

"I never asked her," said the countess, frankly. "I don't see why an educated lady should be expected to answer such personal questions. I heard she had been at Girton, and had since been six months with Mrs. Disney, who recommended her to me. The Disneys of Oldney are a grand old family, and I felt I could trust such an introduction. Mrs. Disney praised Poppie in the highest terms, but said she did not understand boys. As that had no importance to me I engaged her on the spot. I confess," and here my lady smiled, "I do not think she could keep great boys in order, and as Mrs. Disney has sons of ten and twelve in the school-room I quite understood her parting with Poppie, and for our sakes I am very glad she did."

Guy felt bewildered. According to his aunt's account his "child" friend must be at least twenty-two, and to his mind she seemed sixteen.

Then he was convinced Poppie was a truth-speaker, and he had certainly understood her that Ardmore was her first situation. He had believed until her father died, she had never left her home.

Taken altogether he decided Miss Smith was a most puzzling little person.

Lady Munro left the gentlemen over their

wine, and went upstairs to the two rescued ones. Her husband turned to the young men almost as soon as she was gone.

"I think it fortunate you should both have returned now; in a few months the general election will be upon us. For years a Vernon or a Forrester has sat for Ardmore. Now which of you two will contest the seat?"

"Who holds it now?" asked Sir Ira, gravely.

"A nominee of your Father's, a certain Clevedon, a very good fellow! but he's growing old, and wants to retire to private life. The Radicals are to bring forward a 'working-man' candidate, and Clevedon would fight him tooth and nail, but he told me himself he would gladly retire if anyone of staunch conservative views would come forward."

"I am Conservative to the backbone," said Ira, quickly "and I should like to be in Parliament; but Forrester is a good five years my senior, and has double the experience of life. If he'll stand for the old borough I'll throw whatever interest I may have on to his side with heart and will, and take my chance of a vacancy later on."

Lord Munro looked attentively at his heir for a moment. Guy seemed tempted by the proposal; then he answered firmly,—

"I should like it of all things; but there are reasons which prevent my aspiring to a seat in Parliament."

"What reasons?"

"Private ones, uncle. Be assured I appreciate Vernon's generosity; but we will reverse our roles. I will do my utmost to ensure his return. Then when I resume my wanderings I need not think of Ardmore as represented by a Radical, and shall feel that, however foolish I may have been to

and consists of 32 pages of splendid fiction for holiday reading.

my own prospects, I have done no injury to my native place."

Vernon looked perplexed, and yet glad. It was clear he had a great ambition to tack the letters M.P. after his name. All reply was spared him, for Lord Munro broke in eagerly,—

"You don't mean Guy, you are going to desert me again?"

"I don't know, my lord."

"I can't have it; it is too hard on me. You are as surely my heir as though you were born my son. Why must you scour the face of the earth like Cain, instead of settling down as a Christian?"

"My dear uncle, I don't think I have scoured the face of the earth, since all the years of my absence have been spent on one small group of islands; and I don't feel in the least like Cain, but I doubt very much if it is in me to settle down and lead the quiet domestic life of an English country gentleman."

"Then lead the life of a student. Devote yourself to your writing."

"I will stay in England if I can," said Guy, slowly; "but I am not entirely my own master. It is very probable I may apply for another colonial appointment. A second seven years abroad would do me no harm."

"Don't you know you are injuring your neighbours, Forrester?" put in young Ira, lightly. "My sister was always telling me it was a duty to come home and marry; but it was far plainer duty for you. If I am regarded as a reprobate for staying away so long, I should think you were held up to general execration."

"Is it money?" asked the earl hopelessly. "You'll excuse my speaking before an old friend like Vernon; but surely, lad, you know my purse is yours?"

"Vernon will think you far better to me than I deserve; but, uncle, I need no pecuniary assistance. Do you remember what they used to call me as a boy?"

"Fortunate Forrester."

"Well, I think the old title has become appropriate once more. From the moment I went to Maryland everything I touched seemed to succeed. I invested a good sum—seven thousand, I fancy—in gold shares, whose value increased tenfold. Then my banks took people's fancy; and lastly, just as I was coming home, a man I hardly knew died and left me his residuary legatee. When I came to look into his affairs I found it meant property to over two hundred and fifty thousand."

He carefully mentioned only half Jabez Smith's possessions. The other share he regarded as his only in name, and really held in trust for his troublesome and perplexing ward—Anastasia.

Lord Munro stared.

"My dear boy, do you mean it?"

"I believe so. It took me a long time to realise it. Fordred Brothers, of the Temple, managed my poor friends' affairs, and they assure me the amount is even above the figure I named. There is a quaint old-fashioned house near London, and furniture and plate."

"I had no idea you had any very wealthy friends, Guy. Who was it?"

"A lawyer I once employed. He knew the history of my engagement to the present Mrs. Jenkins, and—I fancy—pitied me."

"His pity was worth having," said Ira, succinctly. "Why, Forrester, you must be the richest man in the county! It's simply absurd for you to talk of taking a colonial appointment."

"Of course it is," acquiesced the earl.

"My dear Guy, you must find a nice wife, and settle down near us."

Guy threw up his hands.

"You know Sir Joshua, uncle?"

"Intimately."

"Then you can form some idea of his perseverance and energy."

"The most obstinate man I ever met. I don't believe he ever failed in anything he had at heart."

"Well, for the seven years I lived with him he was good enough to employ all his energy and resolution, strengthened by his wife's sympathy and tact, to find me a partner for life, and he failed. I persuaded him at last to believe the truth that I am not a marrying man. It would make my stay at Ardmore a far pleasanter one if I could induce you and Lady Munro to adopt this view of my character from the first."

The Earl proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room, and summoned Vernon to a match at chess, but Ira soon found their game was only a pretence for securing a  *tête-à-tête* , and discussing Guy's singular conduct.

"Do you think he's mad, Ira?" asked the old nobleman, with no little anxiety. "You've known our family all your life, and you'll take my word for it there never was a case of insanity in it; but, upon my word, I begin to think the sun out yonder (which meant Maryland) must have touched the boy's head."

"I shouldn't think so, Lord Munro. You would have heard if Forrester had had a sunstroke; besides, he really seems to me perfectly sane and collected."

"But with that enormous fortune to talk of going abroad!"

"He's restless, that's all."

"And to refuse to think of marrying!"

"I am not surprised at that," returned Ira, thoughtfully. "I was only a lad at the time Mrs. Jenkins jilted him, but I have always heard his devotion for her was something wonderful. You see, he was five-and-twenty then, and she was his first love. He was hit hard, and I don't suppose he has ever got over it."

"What do you think of the boys?" was Lord Munro's appeal to his wife when their guests had left them.

The countess herself, comparatively young, must have been amused to hear this term applied to men of seven-and-twenty and thirty-three; but she showed no mirth, but answered simply,—

"I am delighted with Mr. Forrester."

"Guy! He is your nephew, remember; and, Ira, he's a fine fellow, isn't he?"

"I—I don't know."

"My dear child," said her husband, hastily, "you must know. He is the son of my oldest friend, and comes of the finest stock in the west; he's the handsomest young fellow you'd meet in a day's journey, has plenty of brains, and never did a dishonourable action in his life. You must admire him."

"I daresay I shall when I know him better; at present he frightens me."

"Frightens you—how?"

"I keep thinking he is plotting something. Don't be vexed with me, but I don't like his eyes."

"Ira has beautiful blue eyes; they'd be worth a fortune to him if he were a girl."

"I don't like men to have blue eyes."

"Why not?"

"They are generally deceitful."

"Well, Ira isn't deceitful; and I hope you won't let this foolish prejudice influence your manner to him. Ardmore has always been celebrated for its hospitality, and I should not like to think my old friend's son was made to feel himself unwelcome there."

"As if I would be so unkind, especially when he brought me back Dollie."

But as her husband stalked off to his dressing-room in grim displeasure, it came

upon Lady Munro as though with a shock that there must be something beyond passing fancy in her aversion to Sir Ira.

She was a devoted mother, and her natural impulse would have been to take her child's preserver to her heart of hearts; but though Ira Vernon had carried Dollie through the storm—though he had delivered her with all possible gentleness to her mother's arms—the countess had never "warmed" towards him. She had spoken words of gratitude, but she had not looked into his eyes with thankfulness written in her own, as she had looked into Guy's when he brought home the second wanderer.

She could not make it out. She was not a superstitious woman, nor one given to take sudden likes and dislikes. She had been prepared to take a fancy to Sir Ira since his promised visit had been a source of pleasure to her husband; she had even thought to herself it would be a pleasant task to invite eligible damsels to the Castle, and help him to choose a mistress for Fairlawn; she had meant to be very cordial and almost affectionate to the young man whose home-coming was so lonely; but somehow his eyes chilled her. She felt an instinctive presentiment that through Sir Ira, trouble would come to her or hers.

Guy Forrester, on the contrary, had touched her heart. She had always felt a pang of remorse for all he had suffered through her marriage, and when she noted the half sad shade of gravity which never quite left his manner, a great desire came to her to do something to make up—to try and give him back in a measure what he had lost.

Lady Munro had not been to London that season, but she had friends there able to make all enquiries, and from them she learned that Mrs. Jenkins had taken refuge with her sister, at Dulwich, in the first flush of her widowhood, and that the said sister had behaved to the poor thing with inconceivable cruelty, and actually turned her out of the house before poor Septimus Jenkins was cold in his grave.

This was surely a little hard on Kate Carlyle, who had borne with Emmeline's whims and lamentations, for three months meeting was nothing but ingratitude and taunts in return; but since Lady Munro's informant had never been to Dulwich, and had only heard of the barrister's wife as a very self-willed, determined woman, so, perhaps, the fashionable news-monger had not meant to be unjust when she wrote that account to Lady Munro, and added the fact that poor Emmeline was residing for the present—"only for the present"—in small lodgings in a quiet part of Belgravia.

"She can't keep up that on a hundred a year?" reflected the Countess. "I think when I have seen a little more of Guy I will write her a little note, and beg her to come with us for Christmas."

This resolution arrived at, Lady Munro went to bed; perhaps her slumbers would not have been quite so peaceful could she have witnessed a scene taking place not so very far from her own room.

Guy Forrester was not used to early hours, and after bidding good-night to his hosts had retired to the library, meaning to read himself into a state of sleepiness; but success did not crown his efforts, the book was not interesting, but he remained preternaturally wide awake. At last he threw down the volume in despair, and gave himself up to thoughts of the past which came surging upon him under memory's flood of recollections.

The Castle had been his boyhood's home until he left Oxford and took those rooms in Clarges-street, so mixed up with the crisis of his life. He could remember no other house. His vacations from school and col-



lego had always either been passed in travels or with his uncle. He loved every acre of the grounds, and every stone of the Castle. His was not a mean nature; he could feel for poor Lady Munro's grief at the loss of her little son; he could understand his uncle's regrets—the sex of his only surviving child cut her off from all chance of inheriting title and estate; but through it all he felt a thrill of gladness that the old place he loved so dearly, the home of his childhood, was not to pass away from him, but must some day call him master.

He would be Earl Munro, of Ardmore, it was almost certain. One day—he prayed it might be far, far distant—he must take his place as lord of the Castle; and as he sat in the old library and pondered over his life, a fact came home to him, which patent as it was, had never dawned on him before.

He was the last of his line. He and the child Dorothea were the last representatives of the race of Forrester.

Dollie could perhaps, in default of any male heir, enjoy the estate (of this he was uncertain); but at his own death the title would be extinct.

Extinct! The Forrester of Ardmore, who had been known and feared even before one of the Plantagenet kings conferred an earldom on the reigning head of the house—the grand old race, who had lived for centuries in honour and repute, would be extinct! The name of Forrester, so famous throughout the West country, would be forgotten!

Sir Joshua and Lady Marton had spent many a half hour in mourning over Guy's willfulness.

The expression of his nephew's intentions (or rather non-intentions) was even now likely to cause the earl a sleepless night; but these friends of Guy's would have forgiven him the disappointment he caused them fully and freely could they have guessed the bitter anguish he was suffering now.

"It was a mistake," he muttered, slowly, through his clenched teeth. "He gave me honour, life, prosperity; but they were too dearly bought; I saved my name; but, oh! at what a cost!"

The veins on his forehead stood out like thick purple cords; the beads of perspiration were thick on his forehead.

The library that night witnessed a sad scene; that of a strong man's agony—of a brave man's despair.

"I had better never have come here," muttered Guy, to himself, "better never have seen the old place again; but how could I tell all it would cost me?"

He rose to seek his room, a small silver lamp in his hand. It was late now—something after one. A great stillness had crept over the Castle; a hush of repose had taken the grand old place into its keeping.

His own footsteps hardly sounded through the thick velvety carpet, and when his ring knocked against the framework of the lamp the slight noise sounded like a loud crash, so intense had been the hush which preceded it.

Lady Munro had allotted Guy his old rooms, and he liked her all the better for giving him the old chamber of his boyhood instead of relegating him to some stately guest apartment, but his quarters were in the west wing, a more distant portion of the Castle, and to reach them from the library it was necessary either to go through the picture-gallery or traverse a vast corridor running the whole length of the house.

Guy preferred the first alternative. The dead and gone Forresters bore him no grudge. He was rather proud of the long array of brave men and fair women who looked down from their gilt frames, his own

portrait being there, painted in the days when he was the Castle's heir.

No doubt Lady Munro's picture now hung beside her lord's.

Again a strange choking feeling came in Guy's throat as he reflected that his likeness would always stand alone. No fair woman's face would ever be pointed out to admiring gazers as that of his wife.

He shook off the sadness by an effort just as he came to the end of the gallery, and then his very heart seemed to stand still.

He hardly dared to breathe. Kneeling on the oaken floor, her face buried in her hands, as though in contemplation of his own picture, was a slender female form.

Guy dared not approach too closely. He saw, as if in a dream, the stranger wore soft robes of flying white, and that a thick cloak of a vivid crimson was flung about her shoulders.

Who was she? What did she there? For a moment Guy felt his brain must be turning. He reeled, and caught at one of the stone pillars running down the centre of the gallery for support.

He seemed to be a child again—a little white-froaked child, under the care of a Cornish nurse, whose head was well stored with all sorts of fairy tales and romances, and who never wearied of repeating to him the family legend.

Probably from the time he went to school Guy had never heard it, for Lord Munro, an eminently practical man, always frowned when it was mentioned in his hearing, and the retainers, catching the clue from their lord, affected to think it nonsense, or perhaps an invention of the old nurse's brain.

Guy had believed it firmly as a little child. Of later years the whole matter was banished from his brain. Not till he saw that kneeling figure before his own picture did he recall the legend of the white lady of Ardmore.

It was a very simple one, only that, as in olden times, all the glories and honours of the Forresters had come to them through a certain Lady Blanche, so her spirit would for all time watch over them, and whenever any danger threatened a member of the family, a female form dressed in white appeared to him as a warning of his peril.

The old nurse had always declared Guy's father saw a woman in white attempt to stop his horse as he set forth on the expedition from which he was brought home dead. She said that, before his mother died, whenever she was alone, a lady in white bent over her; but all this was condemned by Lord Munro as the merest nonsense. Women in white, he declared, were most ordinary objects in summer time, and as to believing they appeared with any supernatural intention, it was the merest absurdity.

And now, years and years after, when the old nurse lay dead in her grave, and when well-nigh thirty years separated Guy from her teaching, it all came back to him, fresh and vivid as though he had listened to her tales but yesterday, and he stood contemplating the still, slight, white-robed figure as though he believed implicitly its mission was to him, and him alone.

He did not know that he really put faith in the legend—he would have found it difficult to analyse his feelings—only he was certain this was the mysterious presence of which he had heard so much.

He never knew how long he lingered—he could not force his feet to carry him to confront the stranger. He stood motionless while she knelt on, though he caught confusedly the sound of a sweet musical voice, half broken by sobs; then he saw her rise, and her face still averted, glide slowly away. He hurried after, but when he reached the broad ante-room on to which

the gallery opened, he saw no trace of the stranger. He waited a few moments, but he heard no sign, saw no trace of human presence; then he went slowly to his own room, his mind strangely perplexed, uncertain whether he was the dupe of a fancy or the victim of a mysterious vision. And through all these doubts there ran a tinge of rejoicing; for though their meeting might bring on him a cruel sorrow, Guy Forrester could not but be glad the same roof sheltered him and Poppie.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1904. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

## THE CLOTHES MAKE THE WOMAN.

It is simply a matter of dress, I say. And the feminine half of the race to-day Might hold in our history just as great A place as the lords of high estate Had they been permitted to wear the clothes

And follow the selfsame styles of those Who, having been born of the opposite sex, Had never a worry their minds to vex.

Had Columbus and all of his valiant crew Worn hats that the ladies of our times do They wouldn't have sailed in those, damp, old ships—

'Twould have taken the curl from their oestrich tips,

And I'm more than delighted brave Paul Revere

Didn't say on that night when the foe drew near:

"I'd like to go warn all the folks, I declare, But I haven't a thing that is fit to wear."

Had Wellington dared but five minutes to wait

In trying to fasten his hat on straight (While Napoleon's hurrying forces came) He wouldn't have climbed to the heights of fame,

And had Washington lingered to "frizzle his hair

The night that he ferried the Delaware, He couldn't have gotten his army away Till the British had gobbled them up next day.

And so, I say, in the race of life, The woman has more than her share of strife,

And man would find 'twould be hard to gain The prize if he had to manage a train,

A shopping bag and a parasol, And high-heeled shoes a size too small—

Ah, me! oh, my! Why he'd have a fit And he'd never, no never! come out of it.

## NOT THEIR BUSINESS.

THEY were tossing about on the wild and restless ocean in a small open boat at least 100 feet from the beach. He was struggling manfully to battle with the surging waves and to pull for the shore. She was sitting in a heap in the stern of the frail barque, holding on like grim death, and mentally vowing that she would never again be tempted by her lover's daring spirit to venture so far from land.

"I know we shall go over," she shrieked, as the boat gave another lurch. "Oh, George, try and manage it."

"I will," he replied, firmly, "I could get along splendidly if the waves did not make it go all ways at once. Don't be afraid, Nellie. We're getting nearer, aren't we?"

"A little. Oh, George, what shall we do if the boat is lost?"

"Don't worry yourself about that, my dear," said George, soothingly. "You must not upset yourself about other people's business. It isn't our boat."

## A GOLDEN DESTINY.

By the author of "Redeemed by Fate,"  
"The Mistress of Lynwood," &c.

### SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The father of Harold, Viscount St. Croix, is anxious that he should take as his wife Ermentrude Seymour, niece of Sir Travice Leigh. Harold goes down to Woodleigh Court for the purpose of proposing to Ermentrude, and while screwing his courage up to the sticking point accidentally meets Irene Duval, the girl he befriended one night on the Embankment in London. Irene Duval is staying in an adjoining house that has the reputation of being haunted, and there Harold meets her while looking over the place. He finds himself getting more than interested in this young lady, and, at the same time, is bewildered by her behaviour and sudden disappearance, for she is mysteriously hurried out of England. A chance letter reaches Harold and he is off in hot pursuit. Anthony Wyndham, the owner of Wyndham Abbey, and Sir Travice Leigh are neighbours. Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, information reaches Mr. Wyndham that he is not the rightful owner of the Abbey but one Geoffrey Wyndham. This Geoffrey, while producing the best evidence that he is the person entitled to enjoy the Wyndham estates, is, in reality, an impostor. But so cleverly does he play the part that he succeeds in obtaining the consent of Marjorie to their marriage. Marjorie only agrees, however, on learning from her father that it is the one way in which they can retain the use of Wyndham Abbey. All excitement on it becoming known that Mrs. Fanning, the Lodge-keeper at the Abbey, has been foully murdered. Roy Fraser, Marjorie's clandestine lover, is arrested and charged with the murder. Things look very black against him, and he refuses to utter the one word that would clear his character for fear of dragging in the name of the girl he loves.

### CHAPTER XXXV.

**H**AROLD'S resolution was made on the impulse of the moment; but for all that it was strong enough to withstand opposition, and also triumphed over his own scruples at leaving England on a long voyage so soon after his engagement.

However, he went to Ermentrude and told her his motives for wishing to go, and, somewhat to his surprise, she immediately acquiesced in his decision—even urged him to undertake the journey.

"You are sure you don't mind my leaving you?" he said, as in duty bound.

"Quite sure," she returned, readily. Then it seemed to strike her that there might be something unseemly in this exhibition of eagerness, for she added, with downcast eyes, "Of course I shall be very sorry indeed for you to be away; but you are acting on behalf of your friend, and it would be very selfish of me to try to keep you back."

"Thank you, Ermentrude. That is a very noble decision on your part, and it makes the execution of my plan so much the easier."

Sir Travice was much struck with the Viscount's devotion to Roy, and made no attempt to induce him to change his decision; but Mrs. Seymour took a very different view, and did not conceal her anger and mortification.

"Why don't you send a detective to Australia?" she exclaimed, when St. Croix had told her as much of the circumstances as he thought necessary—it need not be said that no word was breathed concerning Geoffrey Wyndham—"I call it madness for you to go there—perfect madness."

"There is not much time to be lost, and I shall have a greater interest at stake than a stranger would," St. Croix replied. "Of course I shall take a detective with me, and after all I shall not be away so very long—only about three months."

"But Fraser's trial will come on before that?"

"No, for Barclay will continue to get him remanded over the next session, and so he won't be tried until just before Christmas. Of course we have thought of all that."

"Well," observed Mrs. Seymour, with a shrug of her shoulders, "I know that if I were Ermentrude, I should object very strongly for you to leave me just now. Besides, what will people say?"

"Exactly what they like. Society's opinion has always been to me a matter of complete indifference."

"Have you consulted your father over this matter? But of course you have not—you have had no time to do so. I am sure he will not countenance your plan."

"I think he would if he knew the whole of the circumstances—more especially," added the Viscount with a slight smile, "if he knew that my mind was made up, and that nothing would alter it."

"Lord St. Croix!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, with a very unusual abruptness, "I do not think you can care much for Ermentrude."

The young man's cheek flushed, and he answered, with some hauteur,—

"That is a question between Ermentrude and myself, Mrs. Seymour!"

The tone of his voice warned her to say no more, so she refrained from further persuasion, but went instead to Sir Travice, and asked him to use his influence to prevent the journey.

The Baronet, however, declined, saying that St. Croix was perfectly capable of deciding for himself, and as a last resource Mrs. Seymour tried Ermentrude, who also refused to interfere.

"You are a foolish, headstrong girl," her mother told her, after she found she could not prevail upon her to alter her decision; "and the time will come when you will regret you did not take more notice of my wishes."

Of course, under the circumstances, it was impossible for St. Croix to make many preparations, or to waste any time, so he telegraphed up to an agent to secure his passage in a vessel advertised to sail two days later, and the next morning bade farewell to Woodleigh Court, and left for London.

He little thought how changed circumstances would be when his eyes rested on that stately home again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Affairs went on very quietly after the Viscount's departure. Ermentrude had a telegram from him, sent through the pilot who took the vessel down channel, to say that he was really on his way to Melbourne; and as she threw the little pink sheet of paper into the waste-paper basket, there was a very palpable expression of relief upon her face.

During this time, Sir Travice was gradually getting better, and now he was able to sit up in his room, while his doctor told him that in a few days it would be perfectly safe for him to come downstairs—a decision that was received by the Baronet with great delight—for the role of invalid was extremely distasteful to him.

Mrs. Seymour, who, strange to say, felt great confidence in Wise, and was quite of opinion that he was devoted to her interests—had more than once asked him if he had seen her daughter under the influence of somnambulism again; but as he replied in the negative, she came to the conclusion that Ermentrude's nerves must have been in a state of severe tension when she walked in her sleep, but that under ordinary conditions there was little or no danger of her repeating the dangerous experiment.

Meanwhile, the detective himself had been by no means inactive, and that his plans had been conducted with much caution may be assumed from the fact that his knowledge was quite unsuspected by the people whom it chiefly concerned.

Certainly he had his hands full, but it was a position that he liked, and his head was too shrewd and well-balanced ever to grow confused over the many threads whose ends he held.

Still he knew that a crisis was approaching, and it behoved him not only to be prepared, but to be beforehand.

Accordingly, one afternoon, about a week after the departure of St. Croix, he came in to Sir Travice—who was now sitting in his study—and requested a few minutes' conversation.

"Certainly," said the Baronet, putting down the sheet of the *Times* which he had been reading, and laying aside his gold-rimmed glasses. "I am glad of a little interruption. Wise, for I am tired of trying to find interesting news in the paper."

"I want to ask a great favour of you, Sir Travice," began the detective. "I am sure you will wonder when you hear my request, which is nothing more nor less than this. Can you send your secretary out of the house for four hours on any pretext?"

"It is an extraordinary request," said Sir Travice, opening his eyes widely, and gazing at the unmoved speaker. "May I ask your reason for it?"

"Well, Sir Travice, I hope you won't insist on hearing it, for it may make a difference to my plans; but I promise you that at the expiration of the four hours you shall know not only my reason, but another matter of much greater importance."

"But what has Villari got to do with it?" asked the Baronet, looking puzzled.

"That also will be explained. I am quite aware my demand may sound mysterious, but I am equally sure that I shall be able to justify it to you."

"Very well," resignedly. "I suppose there is nothing for me but compliance. I can't manage it this afternoon, but however, if you will wait till to-morrow, I will send Villari to London to attend a sale of rare books, some of which I want to purchase, and then you may be sure of his absence for at least six hours."

The detective nodded.

"Thank you, Sir Travice."

"But listen to me, Wise," added the Baronet. "I am thoroughly tired of all this mystery, and the sooner it is ended the better I shall be pleased."

"Very well, Sir Travice. Until to-morrow, then."

And saying this, the detective made his escape, congratulating himself on his success.

The next day, Villari left the Court by the early train, and Wise, with great good nature, offered to drive him to the station—a proposal which was at once accepted by Villari, who lost no opportunities of ingratiating himself with the detective.

"There! now he's safely off the premises!" was the mental exclamation of the latter, as the train puffed slowly out of the station; "and now I shall be able to make my search in peace and quietness."

On his return to the Court, he immediately went upstairs, and for the next three hours was invisible—having indeed locked himself inside Villari's apartments, which consisted of bed and sitting room, and were situated at the end of the long corridor, and quite close to the servant's wing.

If one of the servants, or Sir Travice himself, could have seen his employment, amazement, mixed with indignation, would have been the result: for in a most matter-of-fact, and systematic manner, Wise began to turn out everything the room contained—boxes, chests of draws, cupboards—nothing was sacred from him!



For some time his search was completely unsuccessful, for only books, garments, and suchlike personal belongings met his gaze, and he was beginning to look rather blank, when he suddenly came upon a small, square iron safe, which was apparently fireproof, and which was hidden at the bottom of a large travelling trunk.

This he took out and lifted—uttering at the same moment an exclamation of surprise, for its weight was out of all proportion to its size, and no man, however strong, would have cared for the exertion of carrying it far.

After putting it on the ground, he tried various keys on a large bunch with which he was provided, but all to no purpose, for not one of them would fit, and it is to be feared that an exclamation, which was certainly not a blessing, fell from the detective's lips as he saw his plans thus frustrated.

He paused for a few moments, thinking deeply, and then started up with an air of resolution.

"I will do it! It is a risk, but it's the only chance I have," he muttered; "and then he—but not without some difficulty—carried the safe into his own room, and ringing the bell, ordered the dog-cart to be got ready at once.

He looked at his watch. It was now half-past twelve, and Villari would be back soon after four—rather more than three hours and a half. Surely his work could be done well within that time!

It was useless to try and conceal the safe as he went downstairs, so he carried it openly before him, placed it in the cart, and then drove as quickly as he could to Blackminster.

In one of the little back streets dwelt a locksmith rather famed for his skill, and to him the detective went.

"I want you to open this, if you can," he said, showing the safe; "and if it can be managed without picking the lock, I should be glad."

A quarter of an hour later he emerged from the shop with the safe open, and it was as much as he could do to prevent himself from looking at its contents as he drove along, so anxious was he to make himself familiar with them.

However, he restrained his impatience, and as he got back the stable clock struck half-past two; so his journey had been accomplished with as little delay as possible, and he was perfectly satisfied with the result. He chuckled to himself when he locked the door of his sitting-room, and placed the open safe on the ground.

"Mr. Villari will be very considerably astonished to find so much has happened during his journey, I guess," he murmured; and then proceeded to make his examination in his usual business-like manner.

An hour later, and he again sought Sir Travice, who was talking to Mrs. Seymour. "Well, Wise?" said the baronet, interrogatively, and with half a smile. "Is the mystery at an end?"

"That will be for you to say, sir," was she sedate response. "I am ready to explain everything now."

"Go ahead, then."

Wise glanced at the lady, and remained silent. "Oh! you need not mind Mrs. Seymour," added the baronet, following his eyes. "She is in my confidence, and often helps me with her advice."

"Still," said Wise, very respectfully, "if Mrs. Seymour would excuse me, I think that she herself would rather hear what I have to say through you, Sir Travice, instead of from me. I have every respect for Mrs. Seymour, and—"

"I will go," observed the lady referred to, with a slight laugh, though the finely-pencilled brows contracted for a moment. "I can quite understand Wise's desire for a *tête-à-tête*, if he has business matters to discuss."

The detective bowed, and opened the door for her to pass out, then shut it, and came to the table at which Sir Travice was sitting.

"Has your mission at last succeeded? And have you found out who was Lord St. Croix's cowardly assailant?" asked the baronet, finding he did not speak.

"Yes, and not that only, but some other things which it will astonish you to learn," returned Wise, quietly, as he drew from his pocket-book some documents, and put them on the table before him—keeping, however, his one hand on them, so as to make sure of their safety. "I am sure, Sir Travice, you have been very patient with me, for I have been here a long time, and I daresay you have thought I haven't done much work for my money. Still, when you have heard my story you may alter your opinion—perhaps even," he added, with a momentary loss of cheerfulness, "you may think I have been too busy, and learned too much."

"I am never afraid of hearing the truth," said the baronet, steadily, although he began to feel slightly uncomfortable under the unusual earnestness displayed by his companion. "Don't hide anything out of consideration for my feelings, I beg of you. Pray begin."

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

GEOFFREY WYNDHAM did not make much apparent progress in his courtship, for Marjorie's manner seemed to grow colder and colder every day, and at the least attempt at love-making on his part, she froze instantly.

"Marjorie!" he exclaimed, with real passion in his voice, one morning, when, finding her alone in her boudoir, he had taken her hand, and attempted to kiss it. "Why do you treat me so harshly? At least my love for you might move you to pity!"

"I do not see that you have any reason to complain of my conduct," she replied, icily. "I wear your ring on my finger, and that is surely enough."

"It is not enough! Don't you see that I love you—that my old being is thrilled at the echo of your footstep—the sound of your voice? And yet you treat me as if I were the veriest beggar that ever came to your door? Nay—I am wrong; for you are kind to beggars, while you are cruel to me!"

Marjorie—who was arranging some roses in a china bowl—put down her flowers, and looked her betrothed fully in the face.

"If you will recall the terms of our engagement, you will remember that I never promised you affection. To the best of my ability I am performing my part of the bargain we made, and love was certainly not mentioned in it—on my side at least. If you are dissatisfied, I am quite willing to release you, and to give you back your ring again," drawing it from her finger as she spoke.

"No, no! At any price you must be mine. See, Marjorie, I love you so passionately that I will even put up with your scorn in order to make you my wife!"

#### THE LONDON READER 2,000th Number

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Her scarlet lips curved contemptuously; but instead of replying, she gathered up her roses and went on with their arrangement again.

He watched her with a lowering brow for some minutes; then jealously overcame prudence, and he burst out passionately,—

"If it were not for that man Fraser—that murderer—you might care for me yet."

Never had he saw such a change as came over Marjorie's face as she heard these words. The flowers fell unheeded to her feet, and she turned round upon him with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks.

"How dare you say such a thing—how dare you apply that epithet to a man a thousand times better and nobler than yourself? Roy Fraser is no murderer, and it is only a coward who would take advantage of his present position to call him so!"

"It does not much matter what he is called, when the facts show what he is," retorted Geoffrey, beside himself with jealous hatred. "A competent jury has already declared him the murderer of Mrs. Fanning, and you may be sure that ere long he will suffer the penalty of his crime. Besides," he added, sneering, "you should be the last to defend him, considering what his conduct towards you has been."

The moment the words were uttered, he cursed his own stupidity for making such a mistake; but it was too late to recall them.

"And pray what do you know of his conduct towards me?" exclaimed Marjorie, looking at him with pitiless scorn from her lustrous eyes.

His own drooped before them.

"I only know what I have heard—what is the common talk of the neighbourhood."

"And what may that be?"

"I would rather not tell you, Marjorie."

"But I insist upon knowing!"

"Indeed, indeed it will only grieve you," he exclaimed, not knowing how to extricate himself from his difficulty. "I was a fool to speak as I did."

"We will take that for granted," she replied calmly. "Still I wish to be told what the neighbourhood is saying about Mr. Fraser and myself."

"Only that he made love to you, and then threw you over for the sake of Mrs. Fanning."

"Oh!"—Marjorie put her hand to her side, but did not change colour, or show any other signs of emotion. "I wonder, after that, that you should continue to desire our engagement. You cannot have much pride, or you would not wish to be pointed at as the husband of a jilted girl!"

"Marjorie! I don't care what people say or think so that I gain you!"

She turned away with a gesture full of scorn and weariness. A sick loathing took possession of her when she remembered that it was by the side of this man that she was destined to pass the rest of her life—this man whom she hated and despised above all others.

Oh! was it right to sacrifice herself even to save her father from poverty and disgrace? Was he not asking too much from her filial obedience and affection?

Geoffrey, feeling that, in her present mood, Marjorie would be quite capable of breaking off their engagement and defying the consequences, thought it best to leave the room, and went outside on the terrace, where he stood with his hands behind his back, and his head bent, thinking over the situation.

Even now he did not feel sure of Marjorie, for at any moment she might throw him over, and the only way to make certain of her was to marry her at once, if she could but be brought to consent.

Presently he went into the squire, who

was sitting in the sunshine, comfortably reading the *Times*, and enjoying the warmth and freshness of the morning.

"Well!" he said, heartily, putting down the newspaper, and pushing his spectacles on his forehead, "why don't you and Marjorie go for a walk this lovely morning?"

"I am willing, but she is not," Geoffrey returned, with an uneasy laugh. "The fact is, I don't get on with her as well as I should wish; and I think the reason is that she has a prejudice against me which only our marriage will remove."

The squire looked grave. By this time he had grown to like Geoffrey—who lost no opportunity of ingratiating himself with him, and had really begun to think that he would make an excellent husband for Marjorie. Still, and for all this idea, the idea that he was in a measure, forcing his daughter's inclination, often gave him uneasiness, although he told himself that the happiness of her future was well assured by the force of his persuasions.

"I have been thinking," pursued Geoffrey, who knew his power over the squire, and made the most of it, "that we had better be married very soon. The fact of the matter is, Marjorie is very much upset by this charge brought against Fraser, for whom she entertained very friendly feelings; and it would be a bad thing for her to have to endure the excitement of his trial and sentence."

"But he may be found innocent!" put in the squire, hastily.

"He may be, but it is very improbable, and we must not count on possibilities. At any rate, I should like to spare Marjorie the pain of it all; and if we could be married in about three weeks or a month I would take her away to Italy or Spain, or somewhere a long way off, where no English newspapers would reach her. Don't you think the plan a good one?"

"Very, if she will acquiesce in it." "That is just the question," said Geoffrey, with knitted brows; "and I am bound to confess that I am afraid to propose it to her, and so I thought if you mooted the subject she would be more likely to consent."

The squire was silent for a few minutes, then he said,—

"As a matter of fact, Geoffrey, I don't like the job, for it seems as if I consulted my own interests without thinking of her feelings. I don't wish to offend you, but she is certainly not in love with you."

"No, but she will be presently. You are old enough to know that girls are capricious, and also, that love is not the first consideration in life. You must remember that by marrying me, Marjorie is assured of inheriting Wyndham Abbey, and of transmitting it to her children; whereas, if she did not become my wife—"

"Don't speak of it!" the squire interrupted, quickly, and with a movement of his hand as if to waive away the unpleasant subject. "I am assured that it is for her interest to marry you, and that is why I am anxious the wedding should take place."

"Then do your best to persuade her to fix an early day. I don't wish you to speak to her this morning, because we have just had a sort of little tiff—nothing serious, however—and it might not prove a very favourable opportunity, but if you were to broach the subject, say to-morrow—"

The squire consented, and accordingly, on the following morning, went into his daughter's boudoir—where Marjorie spent most of her time now.

She has developed a taste for solitude which was quite new to her, and which was beginning to have an evil result in making her morbid.

"Marjorie, my child, you don't look

well," her father said, tenderly kissing her. "You are growing pale and thin. I expect a thorough change would do you good, and I shall insist on your taking it."

This was rather a felicitous beginning, for it introduced the subject of a wedding tour; and then the squire went on to say that he thought if she could make up her mind to be married soon it would be a very good thing, and please him as well as Geoffrey.

Marjorie listened in silence, and did not raise her eyes. She was in a listless mood this morning, and inclined to acquiesce in anything that was proposed to her, simply because she had not enough energy to combat it.

Besides, she said to herself, as long as she had promised to marry Geoffrey, it did not much matter whether the promise was redeemed sooner or later; and, indeed, it might be somewhat of a relief to think she had taken the final and irrevocable step, as this harrowing suspense would then be put an end to.

So that when her father told her that he should be glad to see her married she replied that he and Geoffrey might fix the time between them, and she would make no objection.

"I only presume one thing," she said, a deep flush rising to the marble pallor of her cheek, "and it is that the wedding shall not take place at Wyndhamstowe."

"Not—take place at Wyndhamstowe!" repeated the squire, aghast. "Not take place at the church where you were baptised and confirmed!"

"No—it is just for that reason that I object to being married there."

"Where can it take place then?"

"Anywhere—in London."

"But you have always said nothing should induce you to be married in one of those dark, dusty, dirty London churches!"

"I have said a good many things, which will have to be unsaid now," she returned, with a faint, sad smile. "Of course, I shall have no bridesmaids, or that sort of thing, and the wedding will be as quiet as it can possibly be."

"Yes," the squire returned, dubiously. Then he kissed her on the cheek. "My dear, if you make your husband's life as happy as you have made mine, he will have nothing to complain of!"

"Have I made your life happy?" she exclaimed, wistfully. "Oh, I am glad to hear you say that—very, very glad!"

"You have been such a daughter as few fathers have, and I sometimes doubt whether I have rewarded your love as I ought to do."

She kissed him tenderly.

"Don't doubt any longer, dear father," she said, with much earnestness. "Love looks for—hopes for no reward, and if I can secure happiness to the remainder of your days, I am more than repaid for everything!"

He turned away and looked out of the window, so that she should not see the moisture which had involuntarily risen to his eyes. Presently, he took a cheque from his pocket-book, and handed it to her.

"This is for your trousseau, Marjorie. I have signed it and left the amount blank, so that you can fill it in yourself."

But Marjorie made no use of the cheque, for it lay unheeded in her desk, and she did not attempt to provide herself with a "trousseau," saying that she had plenty of clothes at present, and had no want of new ones. Indeed, it seemed as if she took no interest whatever in the coming ceremony, for she went about as usual, only becoming each day more languid and listless, and never by any chance referring to the wedding—which was now drawing near—for

the date fixed was three weeks later than the squire's conversation with Geoffrey.

Marjorie sometimes wondered whether she was the same girl who, such a short while ago, ran blithely into the woods, and trembled with blushing delight as she discovered her carven name on the tree-trunk. Had Roy loved her then, or was he only flirting with her because he had nothing else to do?

A question she had often asked herself, but to which she had never yet been able to find an answer.

"I wonder," she said to herself once, "whether any girl was ever placed in so miserable a position before? Thrown over by the man I loved, and whom—Heaven help me!—I still love, and while he languishes in prison, charged with an awful crime, I am going to marry one whom I despise!"

And then, for the first time in her life, she thought with envy of her mother, lying in her quiet, moss-grown grave under the shadow of the old grey church, and longed for the time when she, too, would have laid down life's weary burden, and be at rest!

More than once she thought of visiting Roy in his prison cell, but then came the idea that, in all probability, he would not care to see her, and that by going to him she only laid herself open to scorn and reproach, and so she crushed the desire, although she listened with feverish eagerness to every scrap of news she could glean as to his position—which remained unchanged.

He had been up before the magistrates, and there had been a repetition of the evidence already given, but his counsel had asked for a remand, in order to have time for bringing home sundry important witnesses from abroad, and the remand had been granted.

When he heard this last item of news Geoffrey Wyndham grew pale, and then congratulated himself on his good management, through which he would be far away when the trial took place; and if anything occurred was—well, not exactly pleasant, there would be no necessity for his ever putting foot on the shores of England again.

Yes, he had managed everything very well, and, so far as he could see, had closed up every loophole of suspicion—even that hundredth one which a criminal is said to leave wide open, after he has shut fast the other ninety-nine!

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

"SIR TRAVICE," began the detective, "I must ask your indulgence in telling my story, because, in order to make everything clear to you, I must tell it in my own fashion. Well, on my arrival here, I, of course, thought of all the people interested in wishing for Lord St. Croix's death, and the radius of suspicion grew narrower and narrower, until at last it comprised only three persons—Mrs. Seymour and her daughter, and your secretary, Villari. I see you look surprised, and perhaps you do not agree with my method of proceeding; but, nevertheless, it is one which experience has taught me answers very well indeed, and in this particular case it has not been unsuccessful. —Well, having come to this conclusion, I kept my eyes pretty well open to the movements of these three people, and my first discovery was the fact that Miss Seymour and Mr. Villari had assignments, and met each other pretty frequently."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the baronet, half starting from his chair. "This cannot be true—Ermentrude would never deceive me so!"

"Sir Travice," returned Wise, cynically, "Miss Seymour is a woman, so there is no



end to her possibilities of deceit. However, that is not the point. It is a fact that she met Villari, and these meetings usually took place in the plantation quite early in the morning, before any of the household was about. Fortunately or unfortunately, Lord St. Croix had a fashion of going to the Mere at about the same time—the detective's eyes twinkled, and it may be inferred that he was not altogether ignorant of the existence of Irene—"so, one morning they met, and after that I suppose the young lady thought she ran more risk of discovery, so her time for meeting the Italian was altered from morning till night, and it was after the household had retired that she used to slip out into the plantation."

He paused a moment, and stole a glance at Sir Travice, who was, evidently, as mortified as he was surprised at this evidence of his niece's duplicity.

"Of course you heard all the gossip among the servants about the ghost that was occasionally seen in the plantation," went on Wise. "Well, this ghost was none other than Miss Ermentrude, who was dressed in white, and no doubt thought this was an excellent way of making any of the servants who happened to be out late avoid the plantation, a result which actually happened. At first, perhaps, she had no idea of the kind, and simply stole out in her dinner dress, and with a white wool shawl wrapped round her head; but later on, when she learned the gossip about a ghost having been seen, she used to stick something on the top of her head so as to make her look taller, and throw over this a large white shawl, which effectually concealed her figure."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I have seen it many times. You may be sure, Sir Travice, that I shall say nothing to you that I can't vouch for the truth of. However, it would not have done for me to come and inform you directly I found this out, as in that case my investigations would have been at once cut short, so I kept silence and contented myself with watching. It sometimes happened that I could get near enough to the young couple to hear what they were saying, but this was not often, as they had both pretty sharp ears and eyes. Still, I made out that their interviews were not altogether of an affectionate nature, for frequent upbraidings took place between them, interrupted by bursts of passionate tenderness on his part; and once I heard him break out into fierce denunciation of someone, whom I supposed to be Lord St. Croix. One night I saw the 'ghost' disappear in a way that seemed to me, I must confess, unaccountable; so I made a very careful examination of the spot, and I discovered"—Wise leaned forward and spoke with slow emphasis—"a hollow tree, inside which was a well, of no great depth, and empty of water. About five feet from the top was a secret door, opening with a spring, and this gave access to a subterranean passage leading to Woodleigh Court."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the baronet, more and more surprised as the narrative proceeded. Then he added, thoughtfully, "This is not the first time I have heard there was a secret passage from the Court, but I never knew where it was, nor whether it led. It was used in the old days for hiding loyalists when Cromwell's soldiers searched the house."

"And a fine hiding-place it would make, for you see the well could have been partly filled with water any time, and then no one could possibly have suspected its door. How Miss Seymour found it out I cannot tell you."

"But I think I can, if what you say be true," put in the baronet. "Some time

since I set Villari to examine various old deeds out of the muniment chest, and amongst them was an ancient plan of Woodleigh Court. There he would, no doubt, find the secret passage marked, and, after verifying its existence, it would be quite easy for him to tell Ermentrude, and for her to make use of it."

(This, we may remark, in parentheses, was the case, as the subterranean passage ended in a small room, at the end of a corridor, which was used as a sort of lumber-room, and so Ermentrude ran slight risk of being seen when leaving the house.)

"I was not at first quite certain, whether the person I saw was Miss Seymour, or Mrs. Seymour," continued the detective, "but it was at length proved to my satisfaction that it was the former, and I made sure of it through a fragment of lace which I found hanging on a thorn, and which fitted in a torn place in one of the young lady's flounces. I fitted it in myself," declared Wise, "for I find it does not do to trust to other people's sagacity in delicate operations like these."

"But how did you manage it?"

"Through one of the serving-maids, who offered to mend it for Miss Seymour's own maid. Through something that you said, Mrs. Seymour was rather in a state of mind about the rumours of the 'ghost,' especially, as in consequence of them, several of the servants had given notice to leave, and so I was forced to tell her a little story, to prevent her making inquiries which would have brought everything to light rather sooner than would have suited me."

"And pray what was the 'little story' alluded to?" asked the baronet, who was listening with undiminished interest, and undiminished attention.

"Well, sir, I told her that Miss Ermentrude was a somnambulist—walked in her sleep, you know," added Wise for Sir Travice's enlightenment—"and I knew she would at once imagine this to be the origin of the ghost story, and would in consequence try to hush it up."

Sir Travice smiled, and turned away his head to conceal the smile. Whatever he might think of Mr. Wise's veracity, his ingenuity was beyond dispute.

"Now I come to the day of your accident," said the detective, and then he briefly told of the fraud that had been perpetrated with regard to the two horses, and which—for fear of exciting him—had hitherto been kept from the baronet.

His horror and indignation when he heard about it may be imagined.

"Who can the villain be?" he exclaimed, in as much surprise and anger. "I did not know I had an enemy in the world!"

"But this person would not call himself an enemy; he would say he was your friend, for it was none other than your secretary, Villari."

"Do you mean this, Wise?"

"I do, Sir Travice; and sorry as I am to grieve you—for I know the trust you put in the wretch—the truth must be spoken. It was Villari, and no one else, and he is at heart a murderer; for it was in the hope of your being killed that he changed those horses."

The baronet put his hand to his face and remained silent for a few minutes, then he said in a low voice,—

"What proof have you of this statement?"

"I can prove that the very day before the accident Villari went to Blackminster, and there bought two small pots of paint—one white and the other brown—and after he had painted out the white star on Castor, and painted it on Pollux, he put the pots into a cupboard in the groom's room, so that

suspicion might be directed against them. Unluckily for his plan, a spot of brown paint smudged his shirt-cuff during the operation—a spot so small that I suppose he overlooked it; but I saw it plainly enough when I took the opportunity of being out to glance through his rooms."

"But what could have been his motive?" murmured the baronet in perplexity. "I never did him any harm or offended him, that I am aware of."

"No, but you stood in his way—as did also Lord St. Croix, and so he determined get rid of you both."

"Then do you mean to say he was Lord St. Croix's assailant?"

"I do. I suspected it for a long time, but could obtain no positive proofs, and it was for the purpose of making a thorough and minute search of his belongings that I asked you to get rid of him for four hours. He was always very careful to lock his door when he went out for more than a few minutes, and so I have hitherto had no chance of making an examination of his boxes and drawers, although I have taken a good many cursory peeps. But to-day it was easy enough to open the door with a skeleton key, and I think I may say that there is not a single article in Mr. George Villari's possession, but what I have thoroughly investigated. I must, however, give him credit for being most careful. All the things that could compromise him were together in a heavy iron safe, which it gave me infinite difficulty to unfasten, and I have taken the liberty of making a selection from them. First of all, I found a pistol and some bullets, which I will get you to compare with the one Lord St. Croix extracted from the wadding of the carriage after he had been fired at."

Sir Travice, like a man in a dream, reached the bullet out of his desk, and then compared it with those Wise had brought. They were exactly the same, and there could be no doubt as to their having been cast in an identical mould.

So pained was he by the discovery that he could only gaze at the detective in a sort of bewilderment.

"His motive for firing at Lord St. Croix was, of course, jealousy," pursued Wise, in a matter-of-fact tone. "He was quite well aware that the Viscount was the destined husband of Miss Seymour, and he determined to prevent their meeting. Luckily his vile scheme was not successful, and he dared not repeat it, because he knew everyone was on the alert, and there would be every chance of his being detected, so he kept quiet for a time. Then came the news of his lordship's engagement to Miss Seymour, and—you must excuse my mentioning these personal concerns, Sir Travice—a day or two after you made your will."

Sir Travice assented by a movement of the head.

"That will was in favour of Miss Ermentrude?"

"It was. By it she is made my heiress."

"And the day after it was signed your accident took place. Do you see the connection?"

The baronet started violently, but did not reply, and Wise selected half-a-dozen letters from the pile on the table, and held them out to him.

"If you will read these they will throw some light on the subject, I think."

But Sir Travice drew back with a movement of repugnance. He had never in his life read a letter not intended for his eyes, and he did not like to begin doing it now.

The detective, however, was troubled by no such scruples, and thereupon began to read the correspondence aloud.

The letters were from Ermentrude to Villari, and at first were couched in the

most affectionate—nay, passionate terms. The writer over and over again expressed her love for Villari, and told him that nothing should induce her to marry anyone else. She lamented the fact that their meetings should be so few, but said that it was a necessity, on account of her mother, who was sharp-eyed and suspicious, and who was resolved she should become Viscountess St. Croix. In another letter, she added that it would not do for her to offend her uncle, as she was entirely dependent on him; and although she was treated as his heiress, he could at any time leave his money elsewhere if he were so minded.

The letters were evidently those of a girl very much in love, and ready to do anything in order to gratify her romantic passion, then in its first flush of novelty. Later on, however, they grew slightly cooler, and in one she accused the secretary of not paying her as much attention as he might do when other people were present.

A coquette to her finger tips, Ermentrude could not do without the outward expression of admiration, even though she was aware it might be attended with dangerous consequences.

"Then it seemed as if he must have upbraided her, for the epistles grew shorter and shorter, and in one of the last she said:

"I feel I have been very stupid and imprudent, for I know now that I could never be happy unless I were rich, and I am quite sure I could not make you happy either. Of course you know that I love you, and I do not love Lord St. Croix; but I have no alternative save marrying him, as my uncle has set his heart on the match, and I dare not disobey him for fear of disinheritorship. If he were to die, and leave a will by which I inherited his estates, it would be a very different thing, and then I could afford to throw over St. Croix, and marry you."

Sir Travice's hand still shaded his face, so that Wise could not see his expression as he finished reading the letter, and after a momentary hesitation he took up another, which ran thus:—

"DEAREST GEORGE,—

"I could not meet you in the plantation last night, for mamma came into my room after I had retired, and insisted on staying there. I am very sorry, because I know you will be frightfully disappointed, but it really was not my fault. I shall manage to slip this in your hand at breakfast to-morrow morning. I could see you were very angry with me last night, and I suppose it was because I had accepted Lord St. Croix, but what was I to do?

"I told you all along that when he proposed to me I should have no alternative but to say 'yes,' and I really think I have been very clever to ward off the proposal for so long. Indeed, dear George, it will be much better for you to make up your mind that I never can be your wife, for it is clearly an impossibility. I tell you candidly that even my love for you would not now induce me to accept a life of poverty, though, if you were rich, or I were rich, it would be quite a different matter, and then we might be happy together!

"I have made one bargain with St. Croix—whom, personally, I rather dislike than like—and it is that we shall not be married for some time, and who knows what may happen in the interval?

"Perhaps Uncle Travice may die, and I shall inherit all his wealth, and then I shall be able to give the viscount back his ring—although, to do so, would be a sacrifice, for it is such a lovely one, and the thought of the Dunmore jewels has tempted me very much indeed! Fate is very hard on me, or it would let me have the man I care for, as well as the Dunmore coronet!

"I will meet you to-night at the old

place if I possibly can; but we must be very cautious for that horrid detective nearly caught me the other night, and I daresay he has been poking and prying about ever since. However, I don't think there is much danger of his discovering the door in the well; and if he did, he wouldn't know where it led to, or that by touching the spring a little platform sprang out on which one can stand before entering the apartment. It is really a most ingenious contrivance, and I give you every credit for discovering it. Personally, I rather like making use of it, for there is a spice of adventure in it, and it is truly delightful to frighten the servants into the belief that they have seen a ghost when they have caught a glimpse of me!"

"If I don't come to-night you'll know that I have been unavoidably prevented,—Yours,

"ERMENTRUDE."

"Give me that letter. I want to see the writing," said Sir Travice, in a harsh, changed voice, as the detective concluded reading it; and when Wise handed it to him, he examined it carefully, they laid it down with a deep sigh.

Yes, there could be no doubt that the writing was Ermentrude's, and as this conviction forced itself upon him a groan escaped the baronet's pale lips.

It was hard to feel oneself deceived, and by one on whom he had lavished every kindness. He had treated Ermentrude in every respect as a daughter, although it is true there were certain qualities in her character which he could not admire, and which had prevented his feeling so much personal affection for her as he would otherwise have done. Still, this had never been visible in his demeanour, and he had petted and indulged her to her heart's content, never denying her anything that she wanted, and that it was in his power to bestow.

And this was the return she made!

She had proved herself cold, deceitful, calculating. She had accepted St. Croix, not because she loved him—for such was not the case—but simply because he could assure her wealth and title; and she openly declared her intention of throwing him over if events occurred that would enable her to do it in safety.

Her passion for Villari had been the truest thing in her shallow nature, but even that had not stood the test of time, and the temptation of a noble alliance.

Contradictory as her conduct had been, there yet ran through it all a vein of utter heartlessness, which would have been disgusting in a mature woman of the world, but which, in a young girl, was simply revolting.

And then the way in which she had calculated on her uncle's death! It would almost seem as if she might have been the temptress who whispered to Villari the suggestion that he should compass it. At all events, if his vile plot had been successful, she would not have blamed him, even when she learned that he was, in effect, a murderer!

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1989. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

## ON EARTH.

Ever on earth the flowers have died,  
And short is every song-bird's lay;  
I dream of summers that abide

Always.

Ever on earth have mortals sighed  
O'er loves and friendships turned to clay;  
I dream of unions that abide

Always.

## Society

As to the Coronation some wild conjectures may be found in the papers. Some think the festivities will last two days, others allow a week. Several propose that the King and Queen should go to the Abbey by the route all round London which the late Queen took on her second Jubilee. Of course, the Coronation will occupy part of one day only, and as for the long route suggested, it is sufficient to note that the ceremony in the Abbey lasted nearly five hours in the case of Queen Victoria; and next year, as there will be a Queen-Consort as well as a Sovereign to be crowned, it will last longer. Let us, therefore, have a little mercy on our King and Queen.

It is to be hoped, however, that the proposed progress through London in state of the King, Queen, and the Imperial and Royal guests the day following the Coronation will be carried out. Besides affording delight to the public, it would in a great measure prevent excessive crowding on the Coronation day. From very early times the Kings of England made processions through London to their coronations, but the earliest on record is that of Henry III., in 1236. Having solemnised his marriage with Eleanor of Provence, at Canterbury, he was met on his way to London by the Mayor, Aldermen, and principal citizens on horseback, each carrying a gold or silver cup in token of the privilege claimed by the City of being chief butler of the kingdom at the King's coronation; and so they rode with the King and Queen to their coronation at Westminster.

ONE of the last orders issued by Queen Victoria was for a monument to the memory of the late Duke of Saxe-Coburg to be erected in the gardens at Balmoral. This has just been forwarded to the late Queen's Scottish residence, although it has not been placed in position yet. Queen Victoria left special instructions as to the particular site it should occupy—an eminence quite close to the Castle. The monument is made of Deeside granite, and takes the form of a Celtic cross mounted on a high base.

AN inventory is being taken of the works of art at Windsor Castle, some of which are being valued by an expert. It is rumoured that a number of articles of furniture, bric-a-brac, and pictures at present stored in the various Royal Palaces will shortly be disposed of by public auction. An immense quantity of those accumulated in the Royal Palaces during the reign of Queen Victoria, many of them being duplicates, or otherwise undesirable, occupy room required for works of art in the possession of the King and Queen. If these treasures are brought to the hammer, the sensational prices realised at the last day's sale of the Royal sherry should be equalled or surpassed.

HOUGHTON HALL, which is near Fakenham, is the property of the Marquis of Cholmondeley, but was rented for some time by the Earl of Wilton, who as a bachelor gave many parties there, chiefly shooting parties, and all of them most beautifully done. Two years ago, however, it was let, or sub-let, to Mr. Bishop, a very rich American, whose parties in their prodigality and splendour outdid everything that had ever been seen there before. On one occasion the King himself (as Prince of Wales) was his guest, and on another occasion the Duke of Cornwall (then Duke of York) was present, and was so charmed by the beautiful place that now he is said to have chosen it for his permanent home.



## Facetiæ.

**A GOOD SUGGESTION.**—He: "I am tempted to steal—to steal a kiss." She: "Oh, don't. It's wicked to steal. Let me lend you a few."

**WANTED HER TO HAVE THE BEST.**—Nell: "Rather conceited, isn't he?" Belle: "I should say so! He said the best was none too good for me, and then he proposed."

**QUICK AND EFFECTIVE.**—Willie: "How did you break your wife of the 'advanced woman' craze?" Wise: "Told her everybody thought it meant 'advanced' in years."

**SOCIAL GEOMETRY.**—Miss Freeman: "Why, I thought you knew her. She lives in the same square with you." Miss Hutton: "Perhaps; but she does not move in the same circle."

**AN AGGRESSIVE CASE.**—Featherstone: "Love is an awful thing, old man." Ringway: "Especially when you know the girl you love hasn't got money enough to support you."

**A GOOD FIGHTER.**—She (after a tiff): "Before we were married you called me a lily of the Nile." He: "I never was very good at geography. Guess I was thinking of the Amazon."

**TOO LATE FOR HIM.**—Mrs. Naggs: "The papers say new laws are to be passed to make marriage more difficult." Mr. Naggs: "Huh! Why in creation didn't they have 'em years ago?"

**THE EVIL OF IT.**—Dumbleton: "Fritter's chief fault is that his temper occasionally gets the best of him." Flasher: "Very true, and that wouldn't be so bad if it didn't reveal the worst of him."

**PATRIOTISM.**—Mr. Horsely (to his fresh groom): "Well, you are about the greenest specimen I ever came across." Mulligan: "Grane is it sor? Thank ye, sor; I always thrys to be thrue to me colours."

**A NEIGHBOURLY DISTURBANCE.**—First Neighbour: "Well, my daughter doesn't play the piano any worse than your son writes poetry." Second ditto: "Perhaps not; but it can be heard so much farther."

**NEW PLAYS.**—Bilkins: "I didn't see you at the club last night." Wilkins: "No. I had tickets for the first presentation of a new play." Bilkins: "That so? What was it—a farce-comedy or a farce-tragedy?"

**OMINOUS.**—Laura: "I danced thirteen dances with Fred last night." Lulu: "Not really thirteen, Laura?" Laura: "Yes, that unlucky number, thirteen." Lulu: "Oh, horrors, Laura! Perhaps you'll marry him!"

**A MALE OWNER.**—Jake: "Here's a advertisement in th' paper fer that dog you found. The man wot owns him offers a reward." Jim: "How d'ye know it's a man?" Jake: "Th' paper says 'no questions asked.'"

**NO HARM DONE.**—Chappie: "I'd just like to know what you mean by being engaged to both Cholly and me at once." Miss Pinkie: "Why, bless me! there is no harm done; you can't either of you afford to marry me, you know."

**BIG AND LITTLE LOVERS.**—"I've noticed," said the observant girl, "that the big men are the most demonstrative in their love-making." "Perhaps," remarked the wise girl; "but, after all, a girl should never judge a lover by his sighs."

**ROOM FOR DOUBT.**—Experienced Servant: "Gentleman wants to see you, sir." Mr. Richman: "Who is he?" Experienced Servant: "I couldn't find out, sir; but judgin' by his clothes, he's either a beggar or a millionaire, sir."

**AN INCORRIGIBLE.**—"If there ever was a terrible child in this world," remarked the worried mother, "he's one." "What's his particular fault?" "Do what I will, I can't break him of the habit of telling the truth right out when we have company."

**ANOTHER WANT FILLED.**—Downton: "I see you buy the Evening Smiler. Pretty bright paper, isn't it?" Upton: "Bright! That paper is so absorbingly interesting that when you are riding in a tram car with a lot of ladies standing you don't have to pretend to be interested."

**A CONVERT TO CIVILISATION.**—"Are you aware of the benefits of civilisation?" "Fully," answered the barbarian. "We are realising them already. We have captured a Maxim gun, and the whole neighbourhood is delighted to get away from the old-fashioned method of killing people one at a time."

**DOCTOR AND PATIENT.**—Patient: "But, doctor, didn't you strictly order me to avoid all excitement?" Doctor: "Certainly! In your state the least excitement is most injurious, and may lead to the very worst consequences." Patient: "Then why on earth did you send in that long bill of yours yesterday?"

**MAN'S INGRATITUDE.**—Tramp: "I'm not an idler, mum; I'm unfortunate." Housekeeper: "Humph! Did you ever work for a living?" Tramp: "Yes, mum. I used to be a salesman for Dr. Wigg's gold medal hair restorer, mum; an' I worked so hard and faithfully fer him, mum, that he discharged me." Housekeeper: "Nonsense! Why should he?" Tramp: "You see, mum, the worry an' overwork tryin' to do a big business fer him made me prematurely bald, mum."

**THE OTHER PUPPY.**—Jack: "Miss Peehy's poodle is dead. Did you hear about it?" Tom: "Yes. I'm going up to call on her." Jack: "To condole with her, I suppose?" Tom: "No; to propose to her, now that my rival's out of the way." Jack: "Ah! You want to get in before she takes up with some other puppy."

**TO ENCOURAGE HONESTY.**—Business Man: "No use talking! What is commonly considered business integrity is as near honesty as you can expect while things are as they are." Clergyman: "What changes would you suggest to raise the standard of honesty to a higher moral plane?" Business Man: "Well, for one thing, we'll have to make the poorhouses more comfortable."

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## Gleanings

It is said that the Rock of Gibraltar has seventy miles of tunnels.

ALASKA has only one inhabitant for every eleven square miles of territory.

THE lowest tides known occur at Panama, where the difference between high and low water is about two feet.

ALTHOUGH Sir Thomas Lipton has spent thousands of pounds on yachts he has never made a wager on a boat race.

MOST of the horses in Japan are shod with braided straw, and the shoes are fastened to the feet with straw ropes. They are about half an inch thick, and the cost of four is about one penny.

THE Boer war has seriously affected the business of a certain little town in England, and lately there has been considerable sickness among its inhabitants. An undertaker, commenting on this, said: "Trade has gone to the dogs, and if it wasn't for the funerals there wouldn't be any life in the place."

AT a revival meeting in a Georgia town a man arose and said that he was the wickedest man in the city. "I'd go to perdition if I should die to-night," he concluded. Immediately an old deacon started the hymn, "If you get there before I do, look out for me—I'm coming, too." Then the deacon wondered why everybody laughed.

SOON after her marriage, which took place about fifty years ago, Mrs. Hester S. Thorpe, of Flushing, N.Y., made a vow that she would never pass beyond her front gate. She kept the vow, confining her strolls to her little yard. She never saw a railroad or a trolley car, although both are within a few streets of her home. Her death occurred recently at the age of seventy-two.

AFTER a revival service in Cardiff, Wales, the Rev. John McNeill announced that he would answer any question about the Bible. In a few moments he received this query from a young man: "Kindly tell me who was Cain's wife?" The clergyman made this reply: "I love young men, especially young inquirers for light, and I would give the young man a word of advice: Don't lose your son's salvation looking after other people's wives."

SERFDOM came to an end in Russia at the close of July, 1865. Alexander II. decreed the emancipation of the serfs on March 3, 1861, and the decree went into operation just two years later. The serfs were required to at once pay twenty per cent. of their estimated value to their owners, and the other eighty per cent. was advanced by the Government, to be repaid by the former serfs in instalments extending over many years. This plan worked successfully, and at the close of July, 1865, serfdom had entirely ceased in Russia.

HERE are a few interesting particulars about queer clubs. There are many in London, but America is probably the most productive soil for such institutions. There is no prototype even there for Stevenson's "Suicide Club," but there is at Chicago one with the grim title of the "Autopsy Club." Each member signs an undertaking by which he bequeaths his brain to the surviving members for purposes of investigation. Chicago also boasts of a "Fat Man's Club," and in Paris there is a "Club of the Little Hats," which is really a Bonapartist organisation. In London there are clubs whose chief eccentricity lies in their title, such as the "Cemented Bricks," which originally met in Pump Court, Temple.

THERE is no danger that anyone will carry away Uncle Sam's money stored in the new Philadelphia Mint. The vaults are built on the solid rock underlying the city, of solid steel, the gold vault being seven inches in thickness, while the silver vaults are an inch thick. It is not necessary to take such great precautions with the silver, as it is so bulky and heavy that it could never be carried away except with drays. Big ingots of silver were a few days ago lying about the hallway just covered with tarpaulins. But the officials had no fear of its being stolen.

THE Japanese railway companies, with few exceptions, have discarded American locomotives in favour of those of British manufacture. It is only by one or two of the smaller railway companies that orders for locomotives are still placed in the United States; and for two reasons—cheapness and despatch. During 1900, thirty locomotives were ordered from British factories, an order for twenty-four of them, valued at £66,000, being placed in November. Two of the four sleeping-cars which are in use on the Government railway came from England, and two from the United States.

THE term scapegoat had its origin in a religious ceremony practiced by the Jews of antiquity on the day of Atonement. On that day, when the faithful were eager to purify themselves, a goat was brought to the door of the tabernacle, where the high priest laid his hands upon him, confessing the sins of the people, and putting them upon the head of the innocent animal, after which, the unfortunate goat was sent away and let loose in the wilderness, bearing the iniquities of the people. From this the term scapegoat has come to be applied to one who is made to suffer or bear the penalty of another's crime or wrong-doing.

THE anniversary of the battle of Waterloo brings to mind the opening (two years later) of Waterloo Bridge. The scene on the river would seem vastly antique to-day. There was no Embankment, and hundreds of spectators stood on banks of timber, and on boats, away from the shore. The whole river crawled with boats. The bridge was gay with flags, and from its centre arch a salute was fired as the Prince Regent passed through it on his state barge, followed by other state barges. The bridge had taken six years in building, and was the work of Rennie. How many Londoners could give, offhand, the number of its arches? There are nine, all of equal span. The total cost was £1,050,000.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS originated in Milan, Italy, under the direction of Cardinal Borromeo, in 1580. By his aid and influence numerous schools for the dissemination of theological information of a rudimentary character were established. About the middle of the next century Rev. Joseph Alleine inaugurated Sunday schools in London, and between 1760 and 1763 a number of Sunday schools were started in various parts of England and Scotland by Rev. David Blair and Rev. Theophilus Lindsey. Robert Raikes, of Gloucester, lent valuable aid in establishing Sunday schools in the vicinity of his home, where he was the publisher of the "Gloucester Journal." In 1781 he paid rent for suitable rooms and halls, and in them installed poor women as instructors, to whom he paid a shilling a day each for teaching poor children a fundamental knowledge of Christianity. His efforts had great influence; other philanthropists followed his example, and soon Sunday schools began to spring up in most of the larger towns of England. The first Sunday school in America was started in Hanover county, Virginia, in 1786, under the leadership of Bishop Asbury.

EVERYBODY has noticed that in extreme old age people grow rapidly shorter, so that a person formerly of average height "grows down" into quite a diminutive man or woman. A German contemporary now points out that this decrease of height begins as early as the age of thirty-five years. At thirty, we are told, the human body has reached its full height, which is retained for a few years, after which, the "growing down" process begins. At first, and for many years, the process is so slow as to be almost imperceptible, but at the age of about sixty it begins to be noticeable, and after seventy, even though a veteran does not stoop at all, the fact that he is "growing down" becomes apparent to one and all.

THE man who first discovered the relationship between a cat and a tiger was probably only a child, after all. A very small boy was standing squarely in front of the tiger's cage at the London Zoological Gardens looking up fearlessly at the monster king of the jungle. "Come along, dear, it won't hurt you," said his nurse, probably thinking he was frightened. The child still stood fascinated. The nurse added, with a brilliant inspiration, "Why, baby has a tiger on wheels at home!" Baby looked at her—perhaps scornfully. Anyhow, he knew perfectly well that the creature in the cage had nothing to do with the tiger on wheels at home. He suddenly turned and stretched out his tiny hand, and with an impulse to stroke the furry thing. "Poor pussy!" he said solemnly.

ACCORDING to the fable, the famous Dick Whittington was a country lad, a poor orphan, who heard that London was "paved with gold," and went there to get a living. When almost starving, a kind merchant gave him employment in his family to help the cook, but the cook treated him so badly that he ran away. Sitting to rest himself on the roadside, he heard Bow bells, and they seemed to him to say, "Turn again, Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London," so he returned to his master. By and by the master allowed him, with the other servants, to go to sea in a ship bound for Morocco. Richard's chief possession was a cat, which he took with him. Now, it happened that the palace of the King of Morocco was infested with mice, which Whittington's cat destroyed; and this so pleased the King that he bought the mouse at a fabulous price. Dick returned to London, began business with his money, soon rose to great wealth, married his master's daughter, was knighted, and thrice elected Mayor—in 1398, 1406 and 1419.

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## Statistics

THE total number of persons who committed suicide in Australasia during 1898 was 527—423 males and ninety-four females, corresponding to a rate of 1.20 per 10,000 living. The experience of Australia agrees with that of other countries in the conclusion that the tendency to self-destruction is increasing. Tasmania has always had the lowest rate, while in New Zealand the rate is equal to that in England, where it is 0.92 per 10,000 living. The most favoured means of committing suicide in all the Colonies are poisoning, drowning, shooting (which is more common now than formerly), and hanging amongst males; and poisoning and drowning amongst females.

THE number of insane persons in Australasia under official cognisance in the various Government hospitals for the treatment of the insane at the end of 1899 was 14,285, equal to 3.23 per 1,000 of the population, or corresponding to one insane person in every 309. This rate is about equal to that prevailing in England, where one person in every 319 is officially known to be insane. There is one remarkable difference between the Australasian Colonies and Great Britain, namely, that in England the greater proportion of insanity is found amongst women, whereas in the Colonies it is found amongst men.

## Gems

EVIL thoughts swarm only in unoccupied minds. Be busy about noble things if you would be saved from the ignoble.

NO man knows the state of another, it is always to some more or less imaginary man that the wisest and most honest adviser is speaking.

THERE is a kind of knowledge from which many persons shrink. It is that which involves certain duties and responsibilities which they are not willing to accept.

UNCERTAINTY is the cruellest trial for the heart of a woman to endure, when that woman is resolute and brave, and feels ready to face any danger courageously.

## An Uncomplaining Friend.

ONE of the most cheering friends is an entertaining book. Its friendship may always be relied upon, and no matter how you beat it, it never complains. It is a bi-metallic friend; it will give you either silver speech or golden silence as you prefer. You sit by your firelight dreaming, with your friend in your hand. "Come, come," you say to him at last, "you are silent, and I am weary; talk to me, amuse me!" and he answers not your petulance with reproach, but looks with kindly face into your eyes and talks. At last you are weary of him. "You talk too much," you say; and turn from him. He stops as quietly as he began, relapses into silence and breathes no complaint of your unreasonable mood. A book is never jealous, never suspicious. It asks no attentions. It never pouts or sulks because you prefer another book. It never reproaches you with, "I thought you had quite forgotten me." You cannot pet your cat without a remonstrance from your dog; but you can choose any book out of your library with no look or word of reproach from its companions. It exacts nothing. Conversation is give and take; but reading is all take. The book demands of you only one thing—attention. That you must give, or it closes its lips and is resolutely silent. Indeed, the generosity of this friend is its worst fault. Beware, or it will make you selfish.

## Helpful Talks.

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

**PEACE.**—Glycerine diluted with a little fresh lemon or lime juice will remove sunburn, and whiten and soften the skin.

**VEEA.**—To remove grease from wall paper, lay several folds of blotting-paper on the spot and hold a hot iron near it until the grease is absorbed in the paper.

**HANRINT.**—Surely your woman's wit can devise a means of bringing the young man to book; a glance, a word, a slight pressure of the hand, have done wonders ere now.

**ROSA.**—A girl with winning manners, even though not possessed of a beautiful face or form, is always preferable to one having the latter charms, but vulgar manners.

**FREE GIFT.**—If the things were given in consideration of marriage, that is, conditionally on the marriage taking place, they must be returned; but if given freely and unconditionally he has no claim whatever to any of them.

**GERALDINE.**—The custom of marrying dates back to the earliest period of the world's history, frequent mention being made of it in the Bible. The first reference to it is found in the latter part of the second chapter of Genesis.

**GRACIE.**—To meet the requirements of a classic figure, a female should be 4 feet 4½ inches in height, 33 inches bust measure, 24 inches waist, 9 inches from armpit to waist, long arms and medium long waist. Her hands and feet should be in good proportion.

**BOB.**—It is not considered polite to send a lady a letter written on a half sheet of paper. No objection can be made to the use of tinted letter paper, but in good society, pure white is generally used by male correspondents. Black ink should be invariably used.

**ETIQUETTE.**—"Truly Yours," is merely a polite form of closing a letter, signifying nothing but that the writer is friendly and well disposed to you. Respectfully yours is more formal. Many persons omit "Yours" altogether, and say only "Respectfully," "Truly." The hair inclosed is a golden-brown with no red tint in it whatever.

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**ANXIOUS TO MARRY.**—Unless you are in a position to support a wife it would be almost suicidal to marry, as nothing but unhappiness would result. The possession of two suites of furniture and an organ will not ensure happiness in the married state, if there is a lack of the wherewithal to purchase eatables, clothes, and other absolute necessities. You had better rest content until a position has been secured and sufficient money saved to warrant taking such a momentous step.

**TROUBLED ONE.**—The hands of some persons are moist at all times, and consequently steel articles used by them quickly rust and become black, while the same articles may be handled by others and become brightened by contact with their dry skin.

**LEONARD.**—If the gentleman has proved to be so agreeable and pleasant after a regular introduction, there would be no impropriety in asking him to call upon you at your home. Never extend such an invitation to any one until he has proved himself worthy of the honour.

**ENTANGLED.**—You are making trouble for yourself. Your two suitors will be very apt to find out your double dealing, and hold you in contempt. It is extremely frivolous and heartless to deceive two men whom you say you know to be sincere. You are engaged to both; the day is set to marry both; and each of them has told his family of his prospective marriage. And now you say you feel like a "guilty thing." No wonder. You can't decide which of the two you prefer to marry. Better decide at once, fix upon one and write to the other breaking off with him in the best way you can. Draw straws, if your affections are so equally balanced that neither of the two swains can tip the beam.

**DINER OUT.**—At a dinner-party the lady of the house sits at the head of the table, and the gentleman opposite, at the foot. The place of honour for gentlemen is on each side of the mistress of the house; for ladies, on each side of the master. The company should be so arranged that each lady will have a gentleman at her side to assist her.

**COINCIDENCE.**—You must get over your bashfulness and speak to her. Perhaps if you should tell her your dream she would tell hers to you. That would pave the way to a satisfactory interchange of views on the singular coincidence of your both dreaming the same dream on the same night, and the advisableness of having the dreams come to pass.

**CLERK.**—The only competent system of bookkeeping is that known as double entry, so called from the fact that the complete record of any transaction requires at least two entries in the ledger—one on the debit side of some account, and one on the credit or creditor side of some other account. The utility of this system consists in the philosophical adjustment of the mathematical acts to the most exacting requirements of finance, and in the tests afforded of the correctness of the work at any point.

**DISAPPOINTED.**—You should take the very first opportunity of talking the matter over with the young lady. If the rumour turns out to be true, you can do nothing but bear your own misfortune courageously, wish the young lady every happiness, and always treat her with the most careful politeness. If you were an avowed lover, of course she has treated you badly in receiving your attentions; but you may not have given her any reason to think that you desired anything more than her friendship and the pleasure of her society. If the young lady is engaged to someone else, it is probable that her love for you, if it ever existed, was very faint. Of course you must treat the family with politeness under any circumstances.

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